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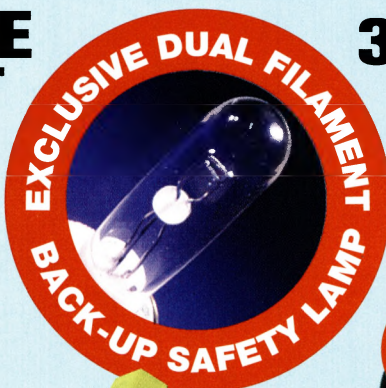
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Much Ado About The Weather



Compared to most of the rest of the U.S., the weather in California is relatively benign. Perhaps that's why such a big deal has been made out of El Niño. (Maybe it's been a big deal in your area, too.) Most of us have suffered more because of the dire predictions about this phenomenon than from its results. Those who believed all they read in the newspapers and saw on TV would have sandbagged their domiciles, bought and stored massive quantities of food and water and then hunkered down in their homes—in front of their TVs—to await catastrophe.

While most of us didn't go that far, many of us were still victims—in one way or another—of the El Niño frenzy. My house is on high ground, so I don't need sandbags. I did, however, cancel off a dive trip because an "El Niño driven storm" was expected. I wasn't alone. The trip, a special Christmas dive that includes a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, usually hosts 20 to 30 divers. It went out with only 12. One of these divers told me that on the morning of the trip people got up early (the boat leaves the dock at 7:00 am) and drove all the way down to San Pedro to drop off the food they had promised to bring. Then they went home. I didn't even get up. I figured one less pie wouldn't be missed. (It wasn't.)

A few days after the trip I spoke to one of the wise divers who went. She said they had a great time. The water was flat and calm in Descanso Bay on the leeside of Catalina, the sun came out for a little while and the trip home, while a little rough, could have been a lot worse. It was then that an El Niño driven fog cleared from my brain. The diver's description of the most recent trip reminded me of those I have taken every December for 16 years. They have all been remarkably

similar. The water in Descanso Bay has always been flat, the visibility on the wreck of the *Valiant* and in the marine park has always been excellent and the sun has always come out (albeit briefly in some years). I have always had a great time. I couldn't recall a bad trip—even during past El Niños. The only way this year's trip differed from those of the past was in the number of people—me included—who didn't go. And we didn't go because we believed predictions of awful weather that never materialized.

One day a couple of weeks after that trip, Angelenos were expecting yet another "El Niño driven storm." As I rode the elevator up to SDM offices, the talk, of course, was of the weather. Since we're on the 18th floor, there was a lot of time to talk. Just before he got off on his floor, one of my traveling companions asked, "Don't we always have storms in December? Why do they have to be 'El Niño driven'?" Exactly. Weather happens, every day of the year, with or without El Niño. And, even with the sophisticated satellite systems used today, quite a bit of it is still unpredictable.

This editorial is being written in December. By the time you read this in March, El Niño may be a thing of the past, it might have flared up again or it might be expected to return in the near future. Whatever. While we can't ignore weather that might be dangerous, neither should we put our lives on hold because there's a possibility something might happen somewhere—there's always *that* possibility. Let's go diving! 🐠

Bonnie J. Cardone

BONNIE J. CARDONE
EDITOR

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*A tek BC
extravaganza*



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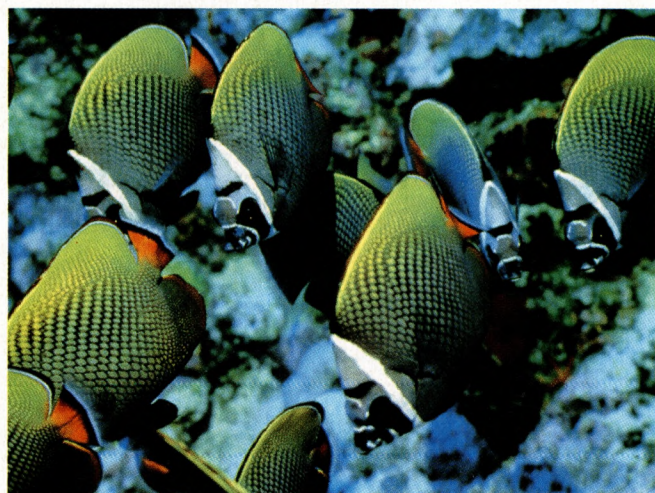
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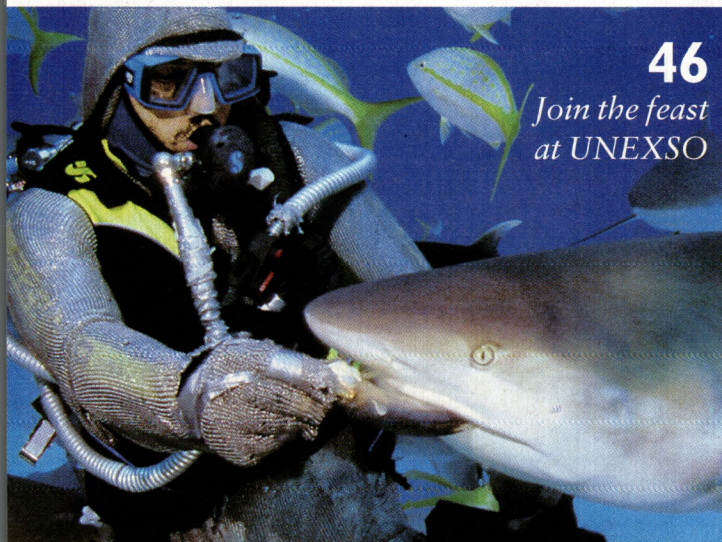
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*Join the feast
at UNEXSO*

About the cover: A diver, with camera in hand, composes a shot of schooling Schoolmaster Snappers sheltered by a coral head. Underwater photographers are frequent visitors to this site at Bloody Bay Wall, off Little Cayman. To read the latest news on underwater photography events in the Cayman Islands and elsewhere, turn to the Nikonos Shootout article on page 30. Photo/Geri Murphy.

continued ►

C O N T E N T S

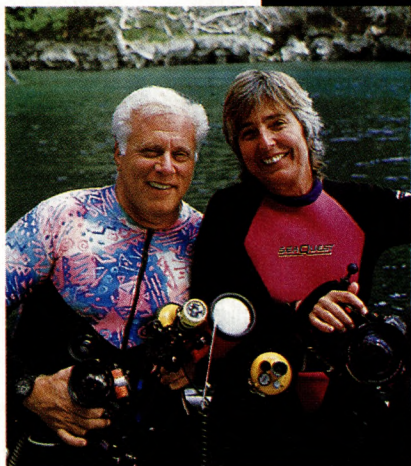


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*Frolic with
the dolphins
in the
Biminis*

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SUBSTROBE 100A

The Substrobe 100A offers variable output and angle of coverage. Simply dial in a narrow beam for more power, dial out to cover wide angle lenses up to 15mm (94°) with just the right power for great balanced lighting. Soft-Lite reflector provides rich reds, oranges and warmer flesh tones. Built-in modeling light.

SUBSTROBE 200

The Substrobe 200 has state-of-the-art electronics which provide a blazing 200 watt-sec. of power, recycling in an incredible 1.6 seconds. The SS 200 delivers an even ultra-wide 100° beam utilizing Ikelite's special soft-lite reflector which produces warmer, more natural colors. Built-in aiming light is bright enough to use as a night diving light. No guessing about when to recharge; the SS200 features an LED fuel gauge showing how many rolls of film can be exposed with the remaining charge.

SUBSTROBE 400

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A red Jeep Cherokee Classic is shown from a low angle, driving up a sand dune. The vehicle's front grille, headlights, and the 'Jeep' logo are visible. The background features a dramatic sky with orange and blue clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The sand dune is in the foreground, and the vehicle is positioned on its crest.

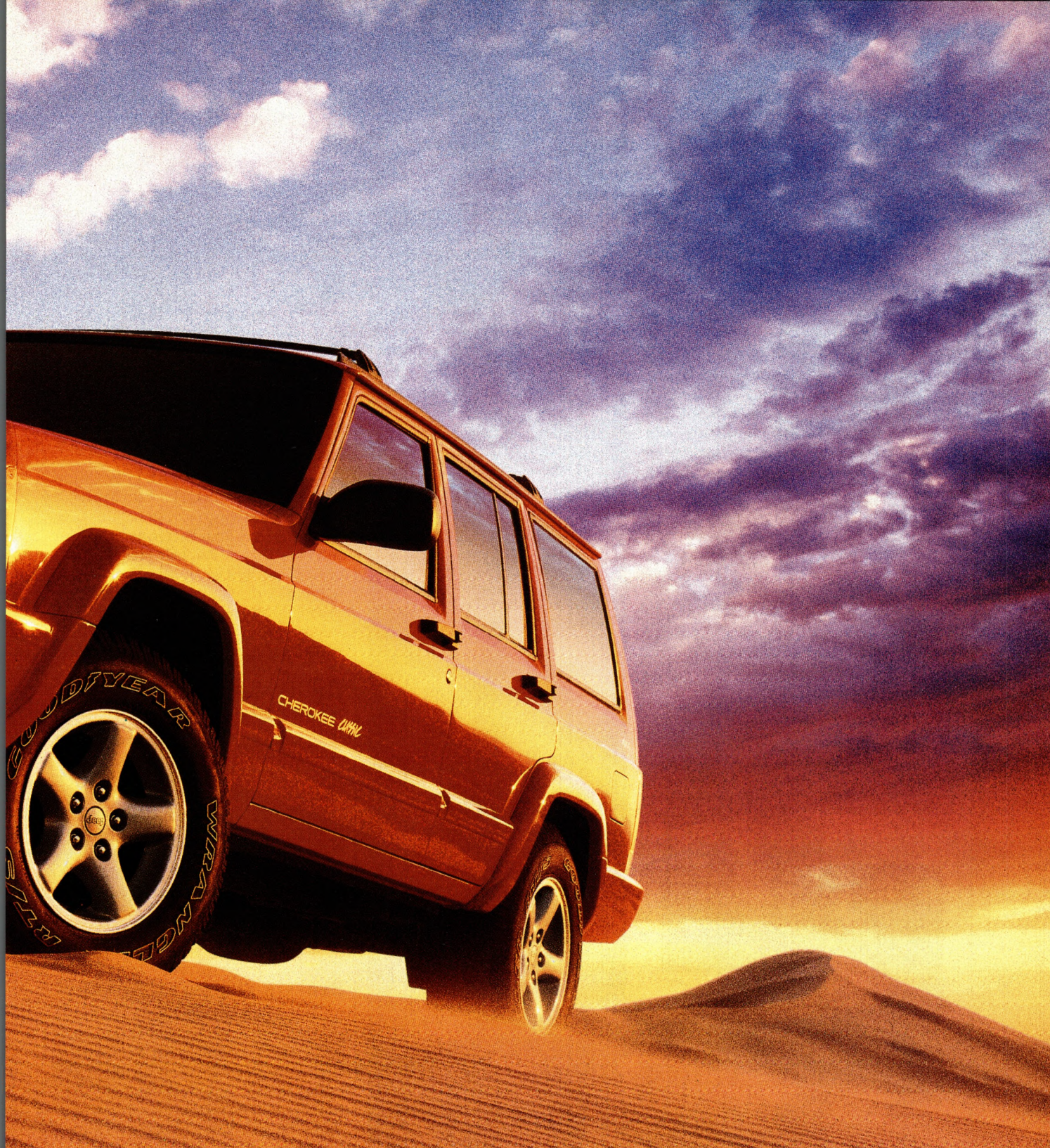
THE NEW JEEP CHEROKEE CLASSIC, AS SEEN BY THE POISONOUS SAHARA SCORPION.

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diver's calendar

PBS' Secrets of the Ocean Realm Series

Howard and Michele Hall spent two and a half years traveling the world's oceans to film the sea's most strange and exotic creatures. The results of their quest will be presented on PBS: *The Great Whales/Shark*, **April 29**; *City in the Sea/Star Gardens*, **June 10**; and *Mountain in the Sea/Filming Secrets*, **August 5**.

For specific times, consult your local TV viewing schedule. 🐠

Boston Sea Rovers' 44th Clinic and Film Festival

Boston Sea Rovers' 44th U/W Clinic and Film Festival will be held **March 7 and 8** at the Copley Plaza, Boston, Massachusetts. Stan Waterman will host and Howard and Michele Hall will premiere their latest whale film. Workshops, seminars and equipment exhibitors will also highlight the show.

For information, call (617) 424-9899; Web site www.searovers.org. 🐠

California Chocolate Abalone Dive

Aquarius Dive Shops will host the 14th annual California Chocolate Abalone Dive on **March 21** at San Carlos Beach in Monterey, California.

Five hundred chocolate abalones will be planted in depths down to 30 feet. Nearly 400 prizes will be given away.

Pre-registration is \$20; same day is \$23.

For information, contact Aquarius at (408) 375-1933, (408) 375-6605, fax (408) 375-3051 or e-mail aquarius@montereybay.com. 🐠

Beneath The Sea's U/W Expo

Beneath The Sea's 22nd annual Undersea Exposition will be held **March 20 to 22** at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, New Jersey. It will feature more than 300 exhibitors, 50 seminars and demonstrations and workshops. There will be a film festival featuring renowned U/W explorers.

For information, visit the Web site at www.cyberus.ca/~bts/, call (914) 664-4310 or fax (914) 664-4315. 🐠

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◀ MASTER LIFT TEK

Neon orange, gusseted side panels distinguish the **MASTER LIFT TEK**'s single bladder air cell, which surrounds the tank's contours and expands away from the diver on inflation, offering a good orientation in the water. An elastic strap system keeps the inflated bladder low profile. From Beuchat, the Master Lift offers interchangeable air cells, available in 44 or 62 pounds of lift. It is made of 840 denier nylon. Releaseable pockets, holding up to 18 pounds of soft weight each, are kept in place with twist locks. There is a well padded harness and the low profile, single band, adjustable backpack accommodates doubles. There are two manual dump valves, plus a dump valve/overpressure relief valve incorporated into the inflator hose. The Master Lift Tek comes in three sizes and has a suggested retail price of \$590, plus \$41 for the weight pockets.



◀ RIG

The harness of the **RIG**, from Dacor, can be customized with a screwdriver and wrench to fit torso length, tank length and user's girth. The integrated weight system holds up to 18 pounds of releaseable weights in each of two pockets. The air cell is of three layer construction, with a replaceable inner bladder. The plastic reinforced harness and air cell are permanently attached; the air cell (L-XL) provides 75 pounds of lift. The minimal backpack can accommodate doubles. The Rig is constructed of 1,000 denier Cordura Megacloth and comes "Spare Air ready." There are 16 D-rings for accessories as well as a small pocket on the front of the cummerbund for an optional signal mirror and rigger line cutter. Two, one inch male quick-release buckles can hold the Reef Saver instrument retainer. The Rig retails for \$590.



◀ TRANSPAC II

Dive Rite's amazing **TRANSPAC II** BC is a modular buoyancy system. Five interchangeable air cells or "Wings" of varying maximum buoyancy (30 to 85 lbs.) are available, as are harnesses in five sizes. There are optional crotch straps, sport cummerbunds, double tank stabilizing plates and a variety of detachable pockets, too. The Transpac II, with the Rec Wings bladder, as shown, has a suggested retail price of \$719.95. This setup features weight release pockets (each pocket can hold 16 pounds of weight and 30 pounds are provided); a double bladder back inflation module (60 lbs. buoyancy) with elastic tensioners; waist strap and quick-release chest strap; location-adjustable D-rings; and a host of other specialties.

bcs

SEA ELITE TECH ►

The **SEA ELITE TECH**, from Divers Supply, is a modular BC made of 1,000 denier Cordura nylon. Harnesses are available in XS through XXL. There are three interchangeable, double bladder air cells available in 60, 85 or 100 pound lift capacities. (Tandem air cells are available for extra safety.) Two integrated weight pockets on the harness hold up to 15 pounds of weight each and there are two accessory pockets. The minimalist backpack, with two tank bands, accommodates a variety of single tank sizes and can be converted for use with double tanks. Optional crotch strap. Six stainless steel D-rings, three hose retainers. The Sea Elite Tech with 60 pound lift capacity air cell retails for \$595.



DUI BACKMOUNTED BC ►

The modular **DUI BACKMOUNTED BC** offers 58 pounds of buoyancy in an elastically tensioned single bag bladder that encircles the scuba tank for stability. The inflator hose can be quickly mounted above the left or right shoulder and the over-pressure/dump can be set up at the bottom of either the right or left side of the air chamber. The BC can be adapted for use with double tanks. The shoulder straps and chest closure can be adjusted for length and height. The waist strap can be height adjusted via twin snap-in buckles on either side and it can be purchased with built-in, reinforced weight carrier panels. Dual weight pocket modules (accommodating 10 pounds of weight each) attach to each panel via quick-dump cable mechanisms. Two unique, elastic retractor clips are suspended from the shoulder straps for attaching small accessories. The BC, with integrated weight pockets, has a suggested retail price of \$696 (a jacket style is \$716).



AEON ►

The **AEON**, from Forté, is an integrated back inflation/harness unit. It carries 12 pounds of releaseable weights in each of two pockets on the front. Two other front pockets are suitable for a backup mask or accessories. There is also a small, zipper closing pocket. The Lightning-Lock waist strap is a combination of a wide, touch-fastener closing strip and an adjustable, quick-release buckle. The uncluttered front has plenty of stainless steel D-rings for accessories. The BC is constructed of 1,050 denier Senior Ballistic military packcloth; its single bladder air cell offers a lift capacity of 45 pounds in all sizes. The tank cradle has one band and accommodates single tanks. (A double tank model is available.) The Aeon comes in five sizes from S to XXL and retails for \$440.



THE
MOST
POPULAR

tek



◀ STEALTH

The **STEALTH**, from Halcyon Equipment, is a modular back inflation BC system. The air cell has double bladder construction and is available in 15 or 50 pound lift capacity. The outer bag is 1,000 denier Cordura nylon. The stainless steel backplate has two nylon webbing tank straps and can accommodate twin tanks or a rebreather. The harness consists of nylon webbing straps. A sheath on the crotch strap contains a three inch long stainless steel knife. The pocket that cushions the backplate contains an optional neon orange Stealth Raft, inflated via the regulator's low power inflator hose. The Stealth Raft can be a rescue device, a liftbag or an ascent line marker. The Stealth BC, outfitted as shown here, including 50 pound bladder, knife and raft, has a suggested retail price of \$622.



ADVANTAGE ▶

The **ADVANTAGE**, from IDI, is a modular BC adjustable for torso height. The BC is constructed of urethane backed, 420 denier nylon. Releaseable pockets on either side of the harness hold up to 10 pounds of weight and plastic retainers help keep the release handles in place. Each of the two additional pockets on the uppermost of the two tank bands holds up to four pounds of nonreleaseable weight, which promotes a face up floating position on the surface. An expansion strap prevents squeeze when the air cell is fully inflated; the gusseted, single bladder air cell provides up to 48 pounds of lift. Cummerbund length is also adjustable. There is a crotch strap and tank stabilizer strap. An optional tank band adapter accommodates doubles. The air cell has elastic cords that minimize air trapping and keep the air cell low profile. Plenty of D-rings and pockets. The Advantage retails for \$450. The weight system is an additional \$30.

bcs

VECTOR XK ▶

Mares' **VECTOR XK** offers traditional wrap-around flotation in an integrated, single bladder design. It can be set up to accommodate single or double tanks. It features two reinforced weight drop pouches (holding up to 13.2 pounds of hard or soft weights each) that remain hidden behind the large zipper accessed accessory pockets. The drop pouches are easily dumped by pulling on large handles that peel away touch-fastener tabs. The Adjustable Cummerbund System, extra wide shoulder straps, thickly padded backpack and padded collar and shoulder openings offer a high level of comfort. In addition to the inflator/dump valve on the left shoulder, there are overpressure/dump valves on the right shoulder and lower right back. The Vector XK has a suggested retail price of \$519.



CHUTE 2 ▶

The modular design of the **CHUTE 2**, from Oceanic, allows the diver to quickly change the back inflation air cell (45 and 60 pound buoyancy cells are available). Using an adapter, the BC will easily accommodate twin tanks. Optional quick-release weight pockets are available (16 pounds of weight each) and there are two non-releaseable weight pockets on the back (3 pounds of weight each). The thickly padded backpack has a convenient carry handle and there are adjustable, quick-release straps at the chest and waist. The single bladder air chamber is made of rugged, expandable Bioflex/Kevlar. Available in four sizes, the Chute 2 is \$499.95 with the 45 pound air cell and \$519.95 with the 60 pound air cell. The weight release pocket system is \$43.95.



TECHLIFT ▶

The **TECHLIFT**, from Poseidon, comes with a back inflation air cell offering 75 pounds of lift (other, interchangeable air cells are available), twin tank bands, removable Trimpack (for use with multiple tanks) and is made of 1,000 denier nylon. Special elastic cords keep the double bladder air cell low profile. The harness can be converted for use with integrated weight systems and is adjustable for tank height, user's girth and torso length. The cummerbund features a special stainless steel waist buckle. The Techlift comes with a clip-on retractable cord for the diver's console or octopus and plenty of stainless steel D-rings for accessories. Available in four sizes, the Techlift sells for \$598.



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◀ SUPERHAWK NT

Scubapro's **SUPERHAWK NT** back flotation bladder encircles the scuba tank for stability and has elastic tensioners to maintain a sleek profile when deflated. The single bladder air cell (available in 32 or 48 pounds of lift) can be separated from the BC body easily. The system can be adapted to fit double tanks. In addition to the inflation/deflation valve on the left shoulder, there are overpressure/dump valves on the right shoulder and lower right back. Integrated weights are held in two quick-dump pouches secured behind the accessory pockets (16 pounds each), plus two nonreleaseable pockets on the scuba tank strap (8 pounds each). There are eight stainless steel D-rings and four plastic snap-in clips placed conveniently on the BC. The SuperHawk NT has a suggested retail price of \$599.



◀ BLACK DIAMOND

The **BLACK DIAMOND**, from Sea Quest, has an internally reinforced harness and a permanently attached, single bag back inflation bladder offering 50 pounds of buoyancy. Elastic tension straps keep the deflated bladder collapsed; it has an inflation/deflation valve above the left shoulder and an overpressure/dump valve on each side of the lower back. Five harness sizes are available and the backpack can accommodate single or double tanks easily. Up to 16 pounds of weight can be carried in each of two pull-dump modules. There are six stainless steel D-rings, two expandable side pockets and one small, zipper-opening waist pocket (on the Multiset waistband). The Black Diamond has a suggested retail price of \$596.



◀ OUTBACK

The modular **OUTBACK**, from Sherwood Scuba, has a removable Trim-Pak and twin tank bands, two releaseable weight pockets and interchangeable double bladder air cells with either 55 or 110 pound lift capacity. Air cells can be piggybacked for a redundant system. The weight pockets on the small BC hold 10 pounds of shot weight each; those on the medium, large and extra large hold 16 pounds each. The bungee lacing system provides a compact, streamlined profile and uniform air distribution in the air cell. The design includes a double tank mounting system and 1,000 denier DuPont Cordura material. The adjustable harness system can be customized to fit the wearer. There is a full complement of stainless steel D-rings. The Outback comes in four sizes and sells for \$625.

bcs

IMPREX PRO ►

The integrated weight pockets on the **IMPREX PRO**, from TUSA, are at the bottom of the non-removable, single bladder, back inflation air cell (not the harness), where they promote an upright position on the surface. Each pocket holds up to eight pounds of weight. There are two additional nonreleaseable zippered weight pockets on the sides of the air cell. The uncluttered front offers two large pockets and plenty of stainless steel D-rings for accessories. The Imprex Pro (M-ML) has 38 pounds of lift. The low profile backpack can accommodate extra large single tanks, each of the two tank straps has a double locking buckle. Made of 1,000 denier nylon with a polyurethane backing. The air cell is gusseted for a low profile when uninflated; the L-XL size provides 43 pounds of lift. The Imprex Pro comes in three sizes and has a suggested retail price of \$580.



SEA MASTER ►

The reinforced harness of U.S. Divers' **SEA MASTER** has a neoprene lining with a rolled edge for comfort. The single bag back inflation bladder encircles the scuba tank and has an inflation/deflation valve above the left shoulder and an overpressure/dump valve on the lower right back. The integrated weight modules hold up to 32 pounds of weight total, which can be quickly released via a unique snap-clip system. The BC can be set up to accommodate twin tanks and the air bladder can be separated from the harness. An adjustable, quick-release waist strap surrounds the wide, reinforced cummerbund. Three stainless steel D-rings, plastic snap-clips, webbing loops and large pockets allow the diver to carry numerous accessories. The Sea Master has a suggested retail price of \$650.



TECH ►

The **TECH**, from Zeagle, features 1,050 denier ballistic nylon construction and an exceptionally low profile cloth/nylon webbing backpack with two tank bands. The double bladder air cell offers 65 pounds of lift. This is an integrated air cell/harness BC, the only one we know of with a single handle ripcord system that releases all the weight carried (up to 40 pounds) instantly. The harness is reinforced with nylon webbing at the shoulders, is extra wide at the waist and closes with two quick-release buckles. Can accommodate doubles. There is a console retainer and whistle on the right side and plenty of accessory D-rings. The Tech comes in five sizes from XS to XL and has a suggested retail price of \$687.50 as shown here.



(Continued on Page 96)

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SNORKELING WITH HAWAII'S FRIENDLY TURTLES

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY TAMMY PELUSO



Every destination has its signature attraction—perhaps sea lions, Manta Rays or Whale Sharks. Without question, the stars of Hawaii's underwater extravaganza are the turtles. Green Sea Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*)—best identified by the single pair of scales on the front of their heads and their dazzling green and brown flecked shells—are quite common in temperate oceans around the world. However, few other destinations have resident Green Sea Turtles with such amicable temperament; none has them in such abundance. In Hawaii, the turtles will typically greet the boat before snorkelers or divers even get in the water. If you swim out from shore you'll probably swim right into them while they lounge on the surface. They are definitely not bashful.

I still vividly recall my first time with them in the water. We were in Kauai, the day was perfect, and we were going to a site that supposedly had tons of turtles. I was ready. Before the boat even dropped anchor we had counted at least a dozen tiny heads on the smooth surface; it was too good to be true. As soon as the engine stopped I was in the water with mask, fins, camera and snorkel. Within seconds I saw them heading toward me and my mind quickly flashed to the divemaster's warning—*Don't touch the turtles!* Green Sea Turtles are a protected species in Hawaiian waters; it is illegal to harass or touch them. *Ok, I can live with that, I thought, but what does the law say about them touching me?* Half a dozen turtles surrounded me and pushed, poked, nibbled and nudged, while I tried desperately to get far enough away to take a photo.

There are many theories behind the peaceful temperament of these particular turtles. The most logical explanation is
(Continued on Page 93)

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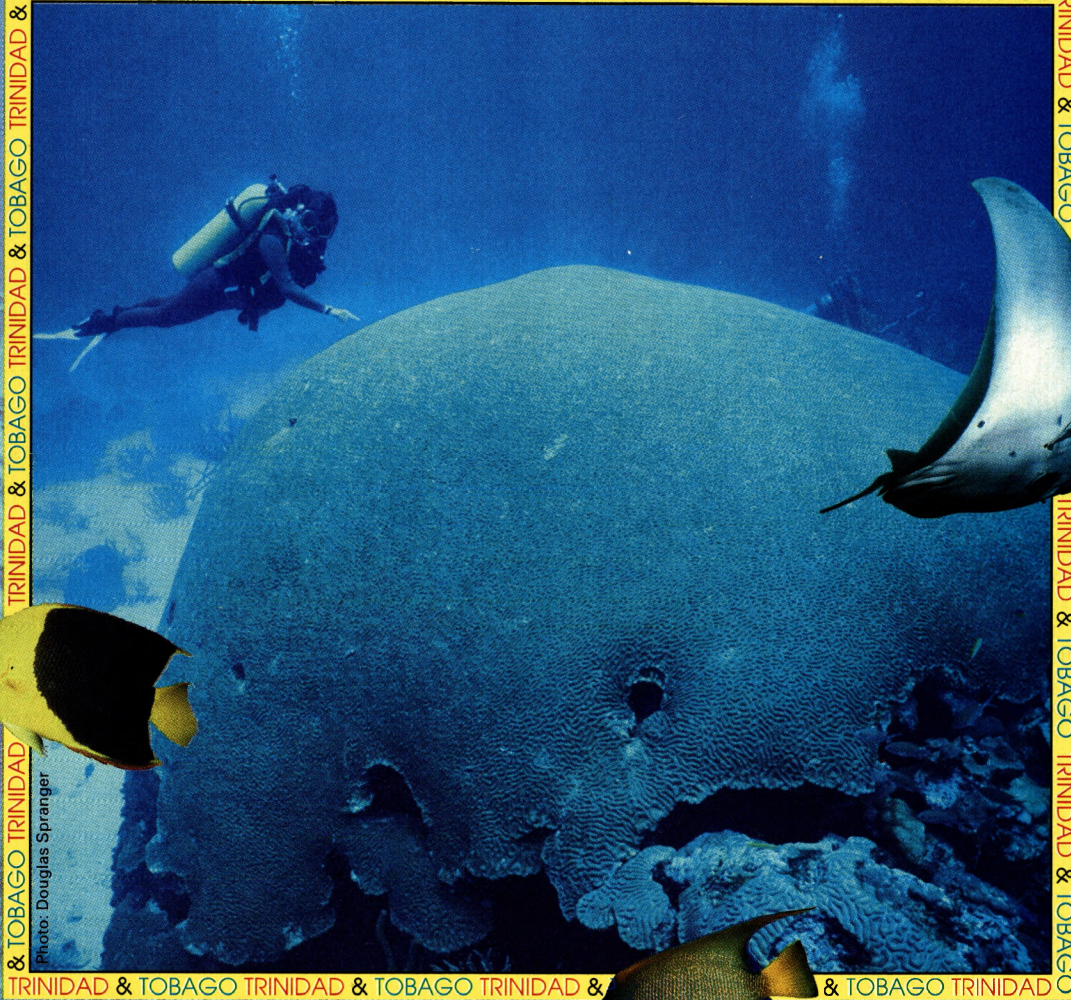
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COME TO LIFE

Sea & Sea VX-1000

DIGITAL VIDEO GOES UNDERWATER!

BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

As we near the end of the millennium it seems digital data is becoming the norm. There are digital telephones, digital music, digital cameras, digital watches and digital video. That's OK because digital data makes communication easier and faster. While video has been around for a while, digital video is a newcomer. And, because it offers crisp image color and technological advances, it was only a matter of time before the digital video camera plunged into the deep blue.

Sea & Sea Products, Ltd., has created a sophisticated housing—the VX-1000 Pro—for Sony's top of the line digital camcorder, the DCR-VX1000. This housing not only makes underwater videography easier but produces high quality images. And, it uses a combination of mechanical and electronic controls to maintain the creative flexibility of the camera.

The Sea & Sea VX-1000 Pro is constructed of corrosion resistant aluminum with a metallic finish. It is neutral in the water for easy handling. The halves of the housing are held together with four catch and strike clamps that incorporate a safety latch to prevent accidental opening. To open the housing, first set it face down on a flat surface that will not damage or scratch the exterior. Push down on the safety latches and release two opposite latches simultaneously. Then open the other two the same way. It is important not to open one latch at a time.

Before inserting the camera in the housing, attach the special baseplate. As you start to slide the camera into the housing, attach the sound mini jack to the front of the camera. This cord connects the microphone on the front of the housing so you can record underwater sounds. After the camera is securely in place, attach the remote control cord to the back of the camera with a second mini plug.

The VX-1000 has a special optical viewer built into the back half of the housing. The removable part of the eyepiece on the Sony camera is detached and stored in a safe place. A spacer is inserted so the remaining part of the viewer angles up about 30 to 40 degrees to align with the viewing system on the back of the housing.

The VX-1000 Pro housing was designed for Sony's Digital Video Camera DCR-VX1000. It is shown here with the external monitor housing, VMC-50/VX.



“This housing not only makes underwater videography easier but produces high quality images.”

Before closing the housing, check all the functions on the camera. This is not difficult and becomes almost automatic after you've done it a couple of times. As with any underwater housing, check to make sure the blue O-ring is clean, seated properly and that no cords are being pinched between the housing halves. The housing back half is secured in the same manner it was opened, by simultaneously closing two opposite latches. Check all the housing controls one more time to make sure they all work.

The creative aspect of the VX-1000 Pro comes from the controls on its sides. On

the right handle, there is the recording start/stop button, zoom button and record LED. The left handle provides control of manual focus, autofocus and image brightness. The remaining controls are on the back of the housing. These include program AE, white balance button, one-touch white balance, internal illumination, shutter speed control and the auto lock/hold switching dial. That's quite a few controls, but most adjustments are set once and not changed during the dive.

Sea & Sea has added a few special features that make the VX-1000 Pro even better. Any moisture entering the hous-



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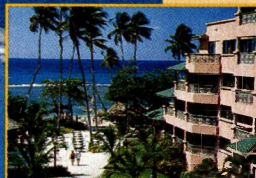
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SEA & SEA VX-1000 PRO

ing will be indicated by a yellow LED flashing in the viewfinder. The top of the housing has a heavy duty carrying handle.

A port on the top of the right handle al-

SEA & SEA VX-1000 VIDEO HOUSING SPECIFICATIONS

Description:	U/W Housing for Sony DCR-VX 1000 Digital Video Camera
Handgrip Functions:	Manual focus, zoom, recording start/stop, stand-by
Housing Functions:	Brightness control, MF/AF, auto lock/hold, program AE, shutter speed, white balance, one-touch white balance, illumination, control dial
Construction:	Corrosion-resistant aluminum alloy, metallic finish
Dimensions:	13.6 x 8.2 x 15.5" (w x h x d), including handgrips
Weight:	15.8 lbs.
Depth Rating:	200 feet
Housing Package Includes:	VCL-0752 Wide Conversion Lens, carrying case, color filter, handgrip, silicone grease, O-ring, angle adjustment spacer, gap alignment spacer, focus gear, 2 N batteries, instruction manual, O-ring remover
Options:	Video Lights CL-8050A, CL-50A, CL-20D video light package, external LCD monitor system, VX arm and Sea Arm V
Housing Retail For:	\$3,995
Camera Retail For:	\$4,199.00

lows the connection of the optional external monitor that fits on the top of the housing. The VMC-50/V housing for Casio's VM-50 video monitor comes in handy for situations when you can't always have your eye focused on the internal viewer. An optional wide angle con-

version kit includes a dome port and wide conversion lens that can be attached to the front of the camera/housing, providing 88 degree diagonal coverage. Sea & Sea also offers U/W video lights and arms.

Technology is changing from day to day. It is really hard to stay ahead of it all. It is nice to see that Sea & Sea has helped



The Sea & Sea VX-65 housing takes the Sony CCD-SC55 or CCD-SC65 high 8 video camera underwater. The camera sells for \$1,499; the housing is \$1,299.

photos/courtesy Sea & Sea



The Sea & Sea Digital Marine FD-7 housing was made for the Sony MVC-SD-7 digital still camera. The photos are stored on a 3 1/2 inch floppy disk in the camera, they can be viewed using the camera or a PC. The camera sells for \$799; the housing is \$1,625.



The Sea & Sea VX-100D housing was designed for the Sony DCR-SC100 Digital Video Cassette Camcorder. The camera retails for \$2,099, the housing for \$1,999.

take digital to the depths of the sea (or at least to 200 feet) with its VX-1000 Pro housing. And since Sea & Sea is now a Sony dealer, you can buy both camera and housing at the same time. The Sony DCR-VX1000 camera retails for \$4,199; the VX-1000 Pro housing is \$3,995.

For more information, contact Sea & Sea Underwater Photography USA at 1938 Kellogg Avenue, Carlsbad, CA 92008, (760) 929-1909. 🐠



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BY TY SAWYER
 PHOTO BY BONNIE J. CARDONE



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The Miller mask features a supple, clear silicone skirt for comfort and a tight seal. The generous nose pocket allows easy clearing and the tough ABS frame should hold up magnificently to the bumps and scrapes most dive masks must endure. The soft, padded neoprene headstrap has a wide profile for a solid, nonslip fit. The nylon webbing and flip-lock buckles are quickly and easily adjustable for fine tuning the mask for the perfect fit.

The split lens design allows for a low volume air space, which reduces underwater drag.

The Miller mask comes in a variety of colors to coordinate with your current gear. It sells for \$84.95.

For information on the Miller Visual Dynamics Anti-Fog Mask, call (801) 779-2683.

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Commercial Diving is Booming and You Can Be A Part of It

DIVERS ACADEMY OF THE EASTERN SEABOARD

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY HERB SEGARS

I was waiting for a ferry to cross the Hudson River from Manhattan, New York to Weehauken, New Jersey when I noticed a barge moored to a pier north of the ferry terminal. It sported a large red and white divers down flag and the logo of a commercial diving company. I wondered what their current project included, until I looked at the pilings that supported the pier and the building that projected out over the water.



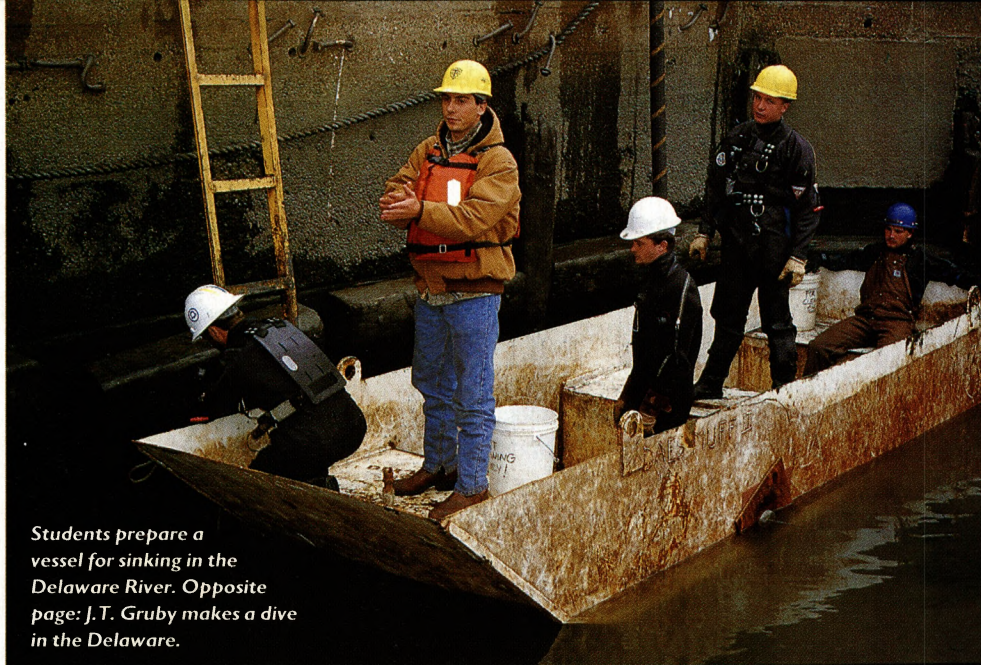
Many pilings were fragments of their original size and all looked in need of replacement. This scene replayed in my mind the time Tamara Brown, president of Divers Academy of the Eastern Seaboard (DAES), told me pier restoration is one of the many facets of the commercial diving industry that is fueling a need for divers—a need she is finding difficult to fill. She said, “I cannot fill all the requests I get for divers. I send out a list of our graduates to the dive companies. They get the list and call me to tell me all the people on the list are currently employed.”

There are many reasons commercial diving is booming. These include increased regulations and standards, pier restorations, power plant work and work resulting from natural disasters such as bridge failures after flooding. Bridge damage occurs through scouring—the erosive action of running water excavating and carrying away material around bridge foundations. Depending on the severity, some bridges are closed until an inspection is done. Natural disaster inspections occur in addition to normal bridge inspections, which have tripled in the last few years. Other projects that provide work for the commercial diver include internal and external outfall pipe inspections at waste water treatment plants and renovation and replacement of oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.

I can't think of a better time to become a commercial diver than when the demand for divers far exceeds the number available. Changing or beginning a career is a big decision. Ideally, this transition should happen quickly, at a reasonable cost, with an end result of steady work and a better than average salary potential.

Making the decision to become a commercial diver is easy; choosing the right dive school is much more difficult. Some factors to consider are reasonable costs, financial assistance programs, a reasonable training period, the best and most comprehensive training, experienced instructors, state of the art equipment and real life training conditions. A school with all these attributes is Divers Academy of the Eastern Seaboard. For firsthand information, call the school and talk to its staff. They will give you honest information about becoming a commercial diver because they want you to succeed in your new career. You will be told that the waters of the Delaware River are cold in the winter; that their real life in-water training is done in poor visibility and that the river bottom varies from hard to muddy. They will tell you they do not have training tanks and that dive training conditions are not Caribbean-like. Their conditions are real—the kind commercial divers experience on a daily basis.

If you started a class at Divers Academy



Students prepare a vessel for sinking in the Delaware River. Opposite page: J.T. Gruby makes a dive in the Delaware.



Dennis Hiedson uses a cutting torch. The welding and cutting course includes 40 hours of topside training before students try it U/IW.



Tamara Brown, president of Divers Academy of the Eastern Seaboard, helps Mitchell Faison suit up on the dive barge.

today, you could be working as a commercial diver in five months. You would have a full range of diving and mechanical skills, the potential for excellent income and be presented with exciting challenges and travel opportunities.

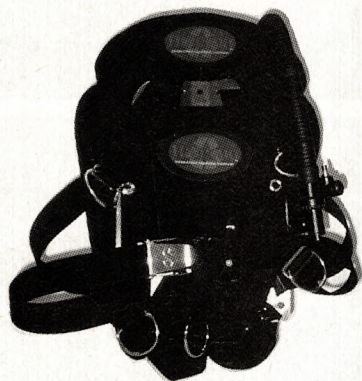
Divers Academy of the Eastern Seaboard is in the Port of Philadelphia in Camden, New Jersey at the South Jersey Port Shipping Terminal. The school was founded in 1977 by Captain William Brown, a commercial diver who knew what it took to turn out quality commercial divers. Captain Brown has turned over the reins of the company to his daughter, Tamara Brown—a commercial diver who started her career on the oilrigs of the Gulf of Mexico. On October 7, 1997, Divers Academy celebrated its 20th anniversary with a renewed vow to maintain the highest standards of commercial dive training.

Not accustomed to resting on their laurels, the management and staff continue to work toward the goal set by Tamara Brown—to turn out the best entry level commercial diver possible. New training instructors have been added and Rich Cortez has been promoted to the position of training director. In his new capacity, Cortez tracks the progress of each student to ensure none falls behind the rest of the class. He acts as a student advisor and coordinates the training program. He provides individual attention to the many details that exist in a growing enterprise.

Course presentation is being streamlined and enhanced with the use of computer technology. The entire staff works as one entity to produce an entry level diver who can work safely and efficiently with a wide array of job skills. The school's diversity is evident in its curriculum. Students

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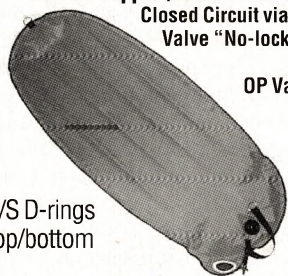


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Divers Academy feels that to make a better diver, it must provide training in other important facets of commercial diving. These are not elective courses but a part of the entire package. The school contracts with Krautkramer Branson Inc., a well known and well respected Non Destructive Testing (NDT) educator and NDT aerospace technology center, to provide a Level 1 certification course in NDT. The students use state of the art equipment to learn ultrasonic testing operations, detectability and inspection techniques, alternate inspection techniques and thickness gauging. This is a skill that has solid potential above water as well as below. Remote operated vehicle (ROV) operation and basic troubleshooting procedures are learned using the school's *Sea Otter*. The welding and cutting course includes 40 hours of topside welding training before students begin to cut and weld underwater. Added training includes an extended rigging course, additional inland inspection training, an introduction to hazmat (Hazardous Material) training and penetration training projects. The school is accredited by the Academy of Commercial Diving Educators (ACDE), licensed by the State Department of Education, has Federal accreditation from the Accrediting Commission of the Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT) and is a member of the Association of Diving Contractors, Inc. (ADC).

To become a student at Divers Academy, you must be at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma or GED, pass a medical examination, have good mechanical ability, be able to swim competently and have a desire to succeed. Don't let your age discourage you from becoming a commercial diver. Divers Academy has students in its current class who are in their middle to late 40s. The key to succeeding as you get older is being in excel-

(Continued on Page 85)



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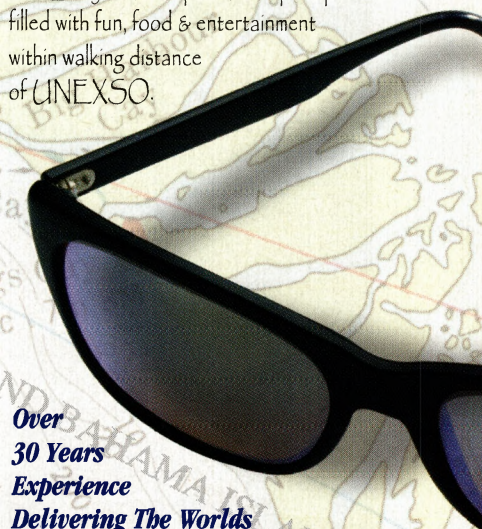
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The 1997 Nikonos Shootout Winners

1998'S
SHOOTOUTS
WILL BE EVEN
BETTER!

BY TAMARA COLLINS



GRAND PRIZE WINNER

Ryan Boerma—Bonaire Macro

BONAIRE: SEPT. 26-OCT. 3 • GRAND CAYMAN: NOV. 7-14





Mike Borne—Key Largo Wide Angle

During four special events last summer, divers converged on the shores of islands notorious for clear, warm water and colorful coral reefs. They came for the diving and the chance of taking a prize winning photograph but found much more. The Nikonos Shootouts offer amateur underwater photographers incredible prizes, parties, education and camaraderie in the spirit of healthy competition. They also offer the opportunity for worldwide recognition of photographic excellence.

Gracing these pages are nine images from photographers who have earned the distinction of being the 1997 Nikonos Shootout winners. Their eye for composition, exposure, focus and framing caught the attention of the Shootouts' judges; professional photographers who have the exacting job of choosing a handful of winners from thousands of entries.

Singling out a Grand Prize winner is even more difficult, but one image stood out from the rest. Ryan Boerma's photograph of Slender Filefish suspended in the safety of sea rod branches won First Place Macro in the Bonaire Shootout. As 1997's Grand Prize winner, he and a friend will be traveling to Papua New Guinea, where they will explore the Bismarck Sea aboard Peter Hughes' *Star Dancer*.

The eight first place winners featured here are to be equally commended for their prize winning photographs. Lloyd Tucker won in Bonaire; Robert Black and Frederico Cabello found their luck in Cayman Brac; Susan Schermer and Mike Borne were chosen in Key Largo; and Mike Kennedy, Russ Haeberle and Barry Heller were se-



Lloyd Tucker—Bonaire Wide Angle



Robert Black—Cayman Brac Macro



Barry Heller—Curacao SLR



“For the past 12 years the Nikonos Shootouts have reigned as the world’s most successful underwater photographic celebration.”



Russ Haeberle—Curacao Wide Angle



Susan Schermer—Key Largo Macro



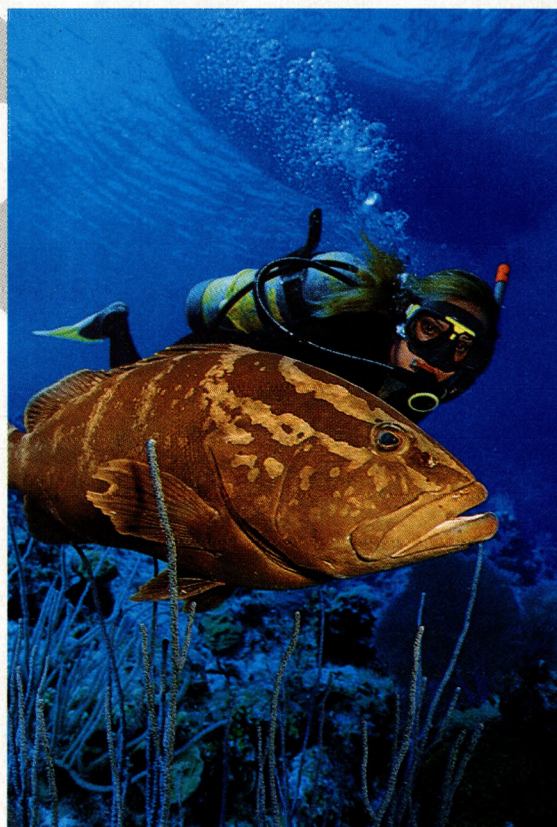
Mike Kennedy—Curacao Macro

lected in Curacao. Each of these contestants will have the chance to once again explore the reefs where they snapped their ideal image; their prize is a return trip to the island, plus accommodations and diving for two.

1998 NIKONOS SHOOTOUTS

For the past 12 years the Nikonos Shootouts have reigned as the world’s most successful underwater photographic celebration. The winning formula for this event combined instruction from several of underwater photography’s leading professionals,

(Continued on Page 61)



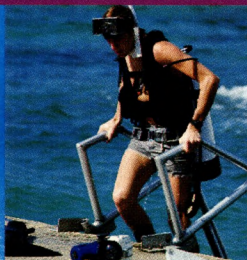
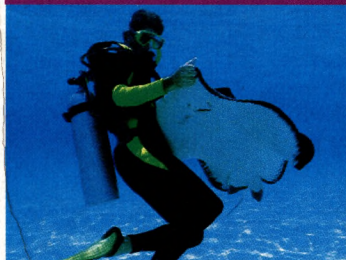
Frederico Cabello—Cayman Brac Wide Angle

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DIVE NOTES

WOMEN ONLY SCUBA ADVENTURES:

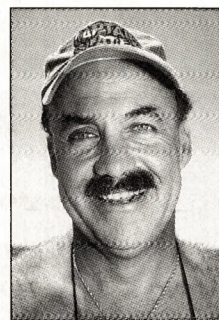
Tropical Adventures has organized two unique group trips for women only. Both were designed with the specific interests and needs of the independent woman dive traveler in mind. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to learn topside and U/W photo techniques from photojournalist Michele Warren Westmorland.

From June 18 to July 5, the group will travel to Papua New Guinea touring the remote Highlands for cultural and nature tours and then to enchanting Walandi Plantation for superb diving in Kimbe Bay. The group will then board Peter Hughes MV *FeBrina*, for five nights diving off New Britain Island. The entire 18 day package, including airfare from Los Angeles, can be arranged for \$5,675.

From August 14 to 21 participants will board the *Sea Fever* in The Bahamas for an encounter with Atlantic Spotted Dolphins. This trip will be limited to only 10 women in order to enhance the interaction between dolphins and the group. The eight day trip will cost \$1,925 per person and includes airfare from Miami, hotel and all meals on the *Sea Fever*.

For more information, call Tropical Adventures Travel at (800) 247-3483, fax (206) 441-5431, e-mail dive@divetropical.com or visit the Web site at www.divetropical.com.

ATLANTIS DIVE CENTER IS VOTED FIRST PLACE IN PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD FOR FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR: For the past eight years, radio station SUN103.1 of the Florida Keys has conducted an annual



People's Choice Awards in the Upper Keys. Results for the 1997 poll are in and Captain Slate's Atlantis Dive Center was voted First Place in the category of Best Charter Dive Operator in the Upper

Keys. This will be the fifth consecutive time it has placed first in this category.

Atlantis Dive Center has been serving the Upper Keys dive community for more than 20 years and continues to be a leader in delivering safe, fun dive vacations and experiences to divers from all over the world. For more information, contact Captain Slate at (800) 331-DIVE or (305) 451-3020.

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6 WORLD-CLASS DIVE ADVENTURES

Diving the **MALD**

Gaudily colored tropicals, such as these Headband Butterflyfish, are a highlight of diving in the Maldives.

I V E S

A SPECTACULAR MARINE WONDERLAND

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY AL HORNSBY

It's a great time to think, suspended 15 feet off the bottom, weightless in crystalline water, being swept along at more than two knots. For as far

as we can see in all directions, there are corals of every description, hundreds of species in every hue imaginable—fawn, taupe, lavender, rose, cinnamon and chocolate.

As we fly over the coralline ridges and hillsides, gaudily-colored tropicals scatter momentarily, then quickly regroup, seemingly amazed at our passing. Here, a Green Turtle banks a

turn to give us a lingering once-over; there, a three foot Napoleon Wrasse rolls a large, dark eye in our direction.

For nearly an hour, we soar over an incredible display of the ocean's abundance and diversity, riding a brisk, incoming tide. Each of us is sealed inside a private reverie

but shining eyes looking out through masks give clear testimony to the wonder we are all experiencing.

I was struck by the almost incredible beauty of a coral reef in its most

(Continued on Page 64)

The Manthiri.



6 WORLD-CLASS DIVE ADVENTURES

The view from the private porch of your guestroom offers a blue green horizon of the Caribbean Sea, framed by a wide, sweeping white sand beach. It is viewed through hibiscus, stately palms and whispering pines. From the deck of the dive gazebo, where shore dives can be launched nearly any time of the day or early evening, you can get a view of the resort or parts of it—a charming tropical architecture sprawling across a private island attached via a bridge to the main island. From the deck of your dive boat, anchored on a permanent mooring along the close-hugging fringing reef, the view expands to include the emerald hills of a beautiful tropical island and a pure blue sky. Nearly every scene evokes the sense of privacy, enchantment and pristine discovery—and that's even before you poke your head beneath the surface of the nearly transparent sea.

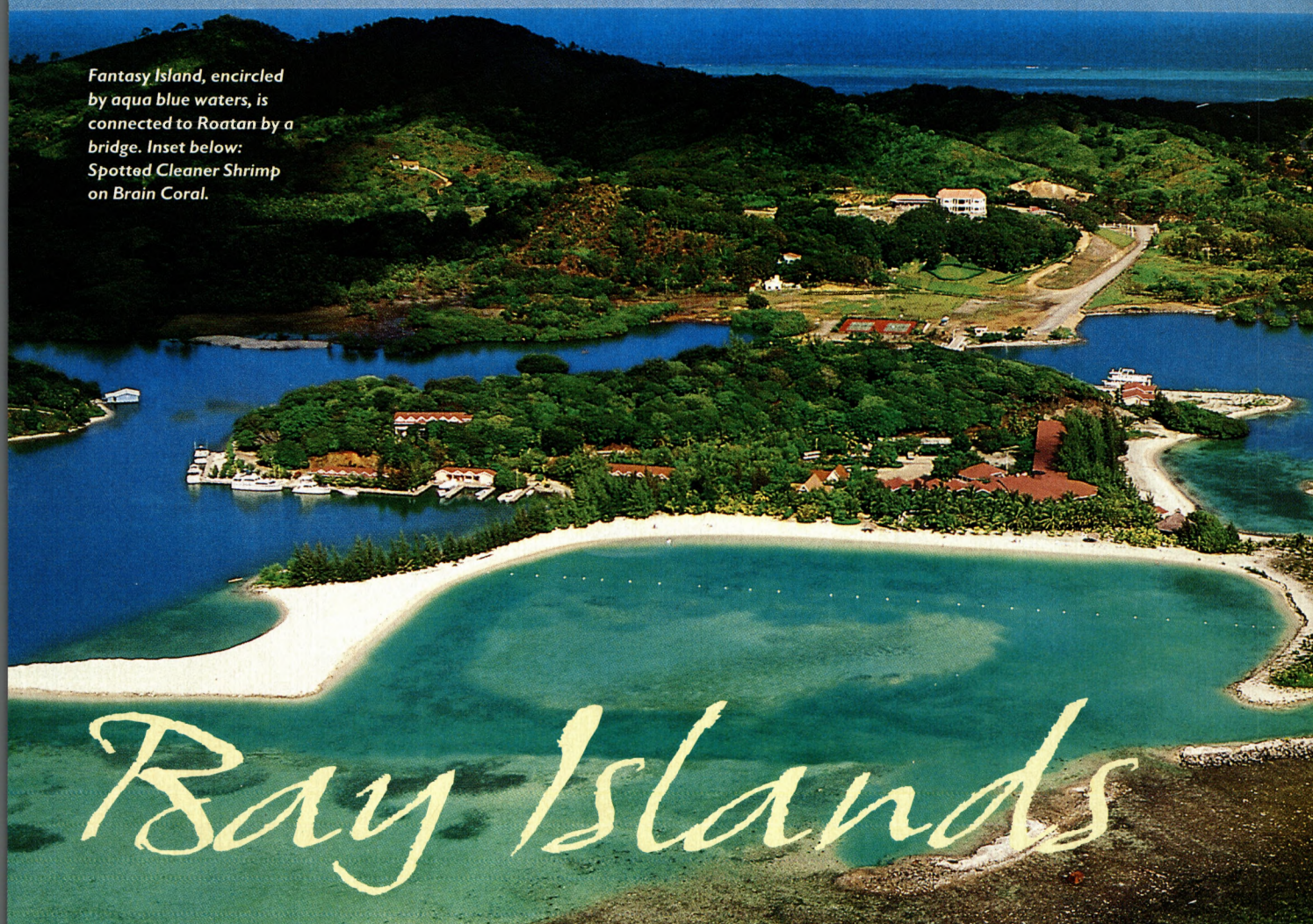


Escape to the ROATAN'S FANTASY ISLAND

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK FREHSEE

A massive sponge formation spills onto the sand at a site on the north shore of Roatan.

Fantasy Island, encircled by aqua blue waters, is connected to Roatan by a bridge. Inset below: Spotted Cleaner Shrimp on Brain Coral.



A wonderful combination of experiences, both above and below water, awaits divers visiting the island of Roatan. Thirty-five miles off the coast of Honduras, in Central America, Roatan provides all the special attributes of a tropical wonderland. Beneath the sea and lining both the southern and northern coasts for nearly 30 miles is a golden reef of nearly unimaginable beauty and proportion. Each coast provides more than 40 known and distinctive dive sites: there are probably 100 more awaiting discovery. There is no sign of massive tourism here; almost every building, even those built for visitors, seems to blend nicely with the natural surroundings. As yet, there are no high-rise hotels, shopping malls, gambling casinos or golf courses. Even the sea routes are uncrowded; only occasionally do you see other dive boats at nearby sites.

And yet, if you choose to stay at the Fantasy Island Resort, you will find yourself with little to desire in creature comforts. Here is a handsome self-contained village, filled with the kinds of amenities nearly always associated with first rate leisure class hotels. The combination of

beautiful Roatan and the Fantasy Island Beach Resort Dive and Marina provides complete support in a wilderness setting.

To begin, there are three things that separate Fantasy Island from every other dive resort on Roatan—the guestrooms, the restaurant and the dive operation with both south and north coast dock/stations. And, all other hotel services and amenities at the resort are unsurpassed in the Bay Islands.

Flying into Roatan is a special experience. If you sit on the left side of your TACA 737 jet (the most popular flights to Roatan are aboard a TACA jet leaving from Houston, Miami or New Orleans), you will see the island below you, lush and fringed with palms, surrounded closely by the fringing reef. Moments later you are whisked through the new and completely modern International Airport, then greeted by a Fantasy Island van and sped away to your private island setting.

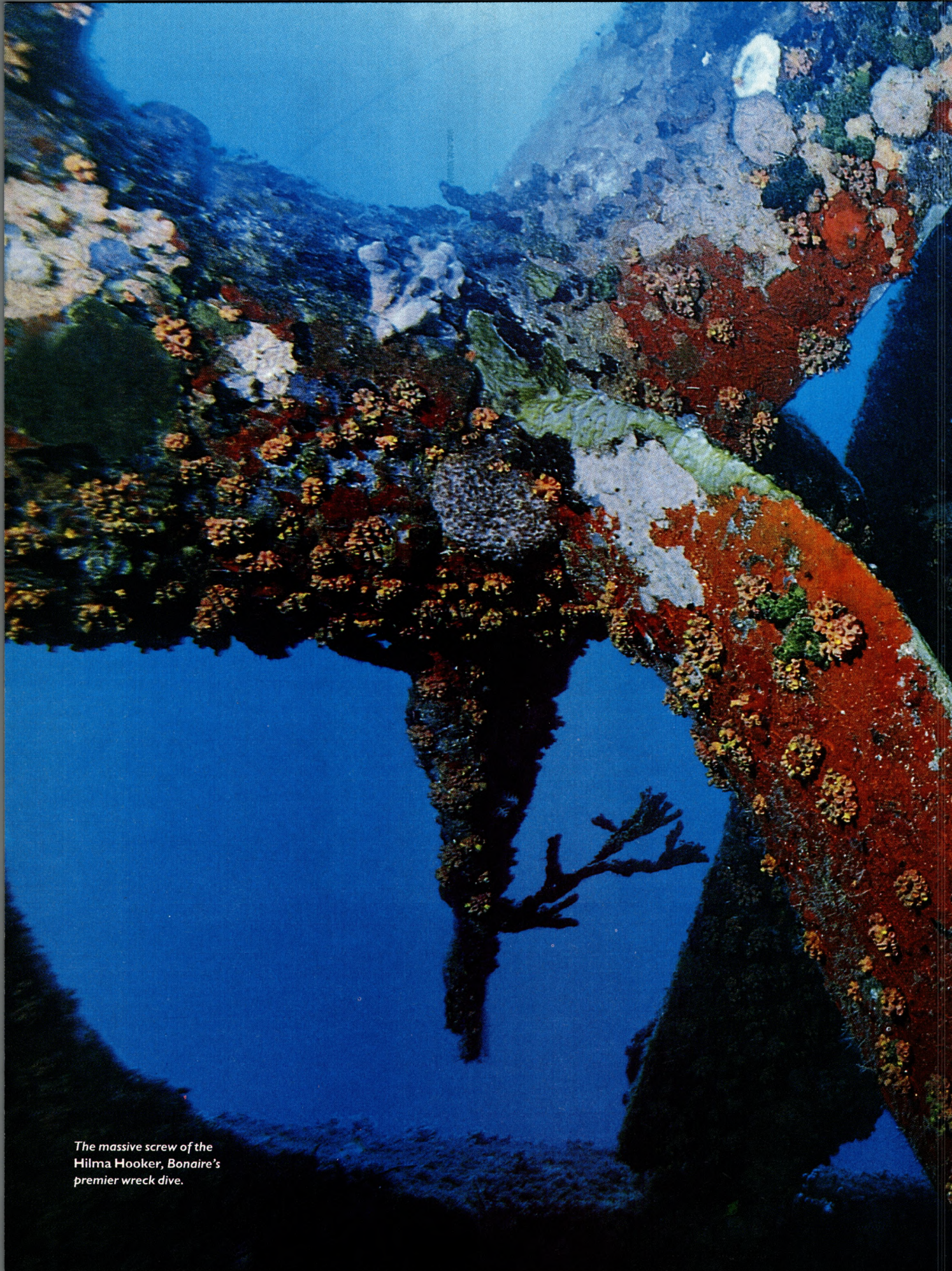
Fantasy Island Beach Resort Dive and Marina is on a 15 acre islet attached, as I have mentioned, to the island of Roatan by a small bridge. Built and opened in 1989 by the Jackson family of nearby French Harbour, the resort has always



been, and will probably always be, a work in progress. Never satisfied by yesterday's version of perfection, additions, renovations and improvements are made constantly. For example, the manicured foliage, now matured, nearly blankets the resort in a breathtaking tropicality. Coconut palms, pine trees and most every other kind of indigenous greenery nearly obscure the original construction.

The focal point is a two story, double winged building painted in subtle tropical tones that houses the huge reception

(Continued on Page 67)



The massive screw of the Hilma Hooker, Bonaire's premier wreck dive.

Sapphire Seas & Vibrant Coral Kingdoms

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY WALT STEARNS

From the deck of Toucan Diving's 32 foot Island Hopper, *Purple Rain*, the waters off the island of Bonaire looked incredibly inviting. They were totally translucent in the 5 to 10 foot shallows, becoming a light aqua where the crest of reef met the drop-off. Just beyond, the sea was a deep sapphire. Off Bonaire, the drop-offs are unbelievably close to shore. Less than 80 feet out, the tops of these descents customarily begin 25 to 30 feet below the surface, cascading to 150 or even 600 feet in some places. Thus, shore diving off Bonaire does not involve long, difficult swims to reach the best part of the reefs. You wade in, swim 30 feet and you're on a reef bristling with life.

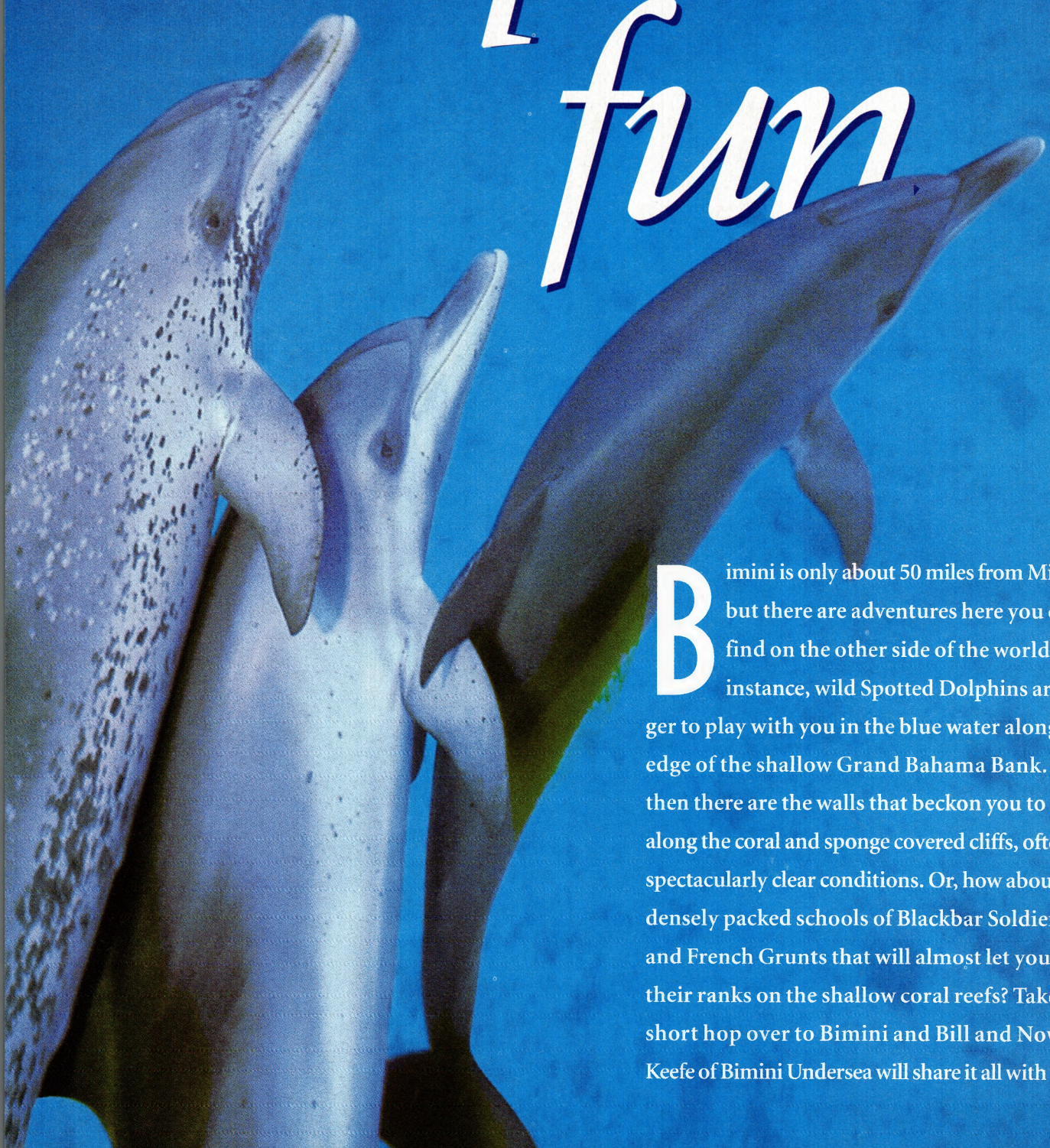
Among the Western Hemisphere's great diving destinations, Bonaire offers thriving coral kingdoms with abundant varieties of tropical fish, invertebrates and brightly hued sponges. Our first dive of the morning on **Rock Pile**, on the south side of Bonaire's tiny offshore island, Klein Bonaire, was as beautiful as advertised. At depths of 40 to 130 feet, scattered among numerous collections of soft corals, majestic sprays of tall Purple Tube Sponges and recliner sized Orange Elephant Ear Sponges punctuated the slope's steep contours.

As I was coming back along the crest near the end of my dive a Toucan dive-master waved me over. He was pointing out something to other divers. The focus of attention was not one, but two medium sized yellow frogfish down in the coral a mere 30 feet from the mooring. All I could think was, it never fails. I had a 15mm lens on my camera and

(Continued on Page 69)



Dolphin fun

A photograph of three dolphins swimming in clear blue water. The dolphins are positioned diagonally across the frame, with one in the foreground on the left, one in the middle, and one on the right. They are all looking towards the right. The water is a deep, clear blue.

Bimini is only about 50 miles from Miami, but there are adventures here you can't find on the other side of the world. For instance, wild Spotted Dolphins are eager to play with you in the blue water along the edge of the shallow Grand Bahama Bank. And then there are the walls that beckon you to drift along the coral and sponge covered cliffs, often in spectacularly clear conditions. Or, how about the densely packed schools of Blackbar Soldierfish and French Grunts that will almost let you join their ranks on the shallow coral reefs? Take the short hop over to Bimini and Bill and Nowdla Keefe of Bimini Undersea will share it all with you.



BIMINI UNDERSEA ADVENTURES: Bill and Nowdla have operated Bimini Undersea since 1982, taking over as owners in 1987. Their personal commitment to the enjoyment and satisfaction of their guests will be obvious from the moment you set foot on Bimini. A staff member will greet you at the plane and get you settled into your hotel. One or both of them is on nearly every trip to ensure everyone has the best time possible.

Opposite page: Wild Spotted Dolphins (*Stenella plagiodon*) frolic in the clear, shallow water of the Grand Bahama Bank. **Left:** Snorkelers on board Bimini Undersea's boat (with Bill Keefe at the helm and Nowdla sitting on the deck beneath him) anticipate their arrival at the Dolphin Excursion. **Below right:** Blackbar Soldierfish (*Myripristis jacobus*).

duct their dives responsibly and computer divers are welcome.

BIMINI DIVING: From a geographic point of view, Bimini is ideally situated for diving. On one side is the Grand Bahama Bank, a virtual nursery ground for reef fish and marine invertebrates. On the other is the deep, clear oceanic river known as the Gulf Stream. In between is the prize for divers: a high energy zone of fish and coral. **Victory Reef, Tuna Alley** and the **Nodules** are exciting wall dives that stretch for miles. The tops of the walls are generally about 40 feet. In some places, the bottom is well below the safe sport diving limit of 130 feet; in others, the wall bottoms out on a sandy flat between 90 and 100 feet. Reef fish such as Black Durgons, Queen Angelfish, Schoolmasters and many others are abundant along the wall, while the proximity of the Gulf Stream ensures that some interesting pelagics are seen as well. Silvery schools of Horse-eye Jacks and big, powerful Permit are common; divers have been surprised by Sawtooth Sharks on occasion.

Star, Starlet and Brain Corals are scattered across the sand in 40 feet of water at the **Strip**, a delightful reef for fishwatchers and photographers. Smallmouth Grunts, French Angelfish, Blackbar Soldierfish and Honeycomb Trunkfish are only a few of the dozens of species represented in large numbers on this



and More Right Next Door

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL HARRIGAN

Bimini Undersea operates two excellent dive boats. *Adventurer* is a spacious, stable 42 foot Stapleton with twin diesels. A major overhaul has just been completed on this boat, restoring it to like new condition. The other boat is called *Delphine*, a 32 foot Island Hopper with an easy ride and a good turn of speed. Naturally, both boats are outfitted with all the necessary safety equipment. The dive schedule is flexible enough to accommodate special requests, with three dives scheduled each day and night dives available on Tuesdays and Fridays. The 10 full sets of rental dive gear on hand at Bimini Undersea are replaced every two years to ensure any equipment you use will be in good working order. Snorkel gear and boutique items such as hats and T-shirts are also sold in the shop.

In addition to Bill and Nowdla, the Bimini Undersea staff includes instructors Melanie Philippi and Xenia Brobiel, and shop manager Sophia Bowleg. As a group, they exhibit a zest every day that makes you think it's all just fun. Their enthusiasm and helpfulness, however, is matched by their competence in their jobs. Melanie and Xenia will guide dives on request, but they don't insist on running your dive for you. Buddy pairs are free to con-

reef. Large coral heads of multiple species are scattered all around at the **Kinks**, creating a maze for divers. The sand surrounding the tall formations provides a convenient place to stop and check out the coral at a leisurely pace.

The **Bimini Barge, Sapona** and **Bimini Trader** are three of the wrecks regularly dived by Bimini Undersea. All have been down long enough to become thickly encrusted with corals and sponges and are surrounded by reef fish and pelagics. Each seems to have resident Green Moray Eels and Hawksbill Turtles, seen by divers on nearly every visit.

WILD DOLPHIN EXCURSION: This is an experience you will never forget. Bill and Nowdla have been running this unique trip for more than a year and have been successful more than 80 percent of the time. This is remarkable when you consider the dolphins are completely wild and initiate these encounters on their own accord.

The Wild Dolphin Excursion is a snorkel-only trip, mostly because the dolphins won't tolerate scuba gear. The more actively you snorkel with them, the more they like it, but they stay away from anyone with a tank and regulator. Of course, you don't

(Continued on Page 71)

A Time to Discover the Dominican Republic

ECOLOGICALLY DIVERSE PUNTA CANA BEACH RESORT

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY WALT STEARNS

The Punta Cana reef system is a majestic expanse. At the easternmost end of the Dominican Republic, the second largest island in the Caribbean, it is the longest continuous reef tract in the region as well as the least explored.

Starting just beyond the shore and extending as much as a mile out, its well developed spur and groove formations bottom out at 50 feet. Just beyond the end of this first main reef, beginning between 50 to 75 feet, the broad expanse of white sand bottom is dotted with numerous patch reefs adorned with large, colorful sponges and gorgonians. Still farther out, at 80 to 100 feet, the bottom begins to drop away to the deeper reaches of the Mona Passage, where, on occasion, divers will find cruising reef sharks.

Occupying an area where the tropical Atlantic and Caribbean meet, Punta Cana's diving conditions are customarily favorable year-round. Underwater visibility averages between 50 and 100 feet, with temperatures seldom falling lower than the upper 70s (°F) in winter. Accessing this far-away region of the Dominican Republic is the Punta Cana Beach Resort and Ecological Foundation.

The resort covers a 105 acre slice of this immense, sprawling, undeveloped region and is divided into separate, luxuriant, modern complexes containing 400 rooms in all. Primary accommodations included Cocotal ocean view rooms, right on the beach, with two queen sized beds; the Superior, with two full sized beds (also with close access to the beach); and the Villas, two and three bedroom complexes in either the tennis or beach areas, sharing a centrally located living and dining room

with kitchenette. The bedrooms in the Villas feature one double or two full sized beds. All rooms have with air-conditioning, direct dial telephone, security box, cable TV, hairdryer and either a balcony or terrace.



Above: An aerial view of the lush grounds of the Punta Cana Beach Resort. Below: Guests luxuriate in the tropical splendor of uncrowded white sand beaches and warm, calm water.



Guests on the half-board meal plan can indulge in buffetstyle breakfasts and dinners (with a different theme each night). Dining a la carte, with a small, additional surcharge, is also an option at Mamma Venezia (specializing in Italian); La Cana, La Tortuga or La Choza (with menus offering both Caribbean and international choices); and Franco's Pizzeria.

Among one of the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation's preservation programs is the 1,555 acre transitional forest (a type of forest that falls between tropical rain forest and dry forest), donated by the resort owners, Grupo Punta Cana. Named the Indian Eyes Park (centered between the resort grounds and newly completed Marina Punta Cana), it is not only beautiful, but also unique in that it is supplied by an underground river system emerging at 12 different natural spring basins.

In addition to the park and 800 meter span of private beach, major facilities on the grounds include an immense swimming pool, a couple of tennis courts, large conference rooms (each will seat up to 200), as well as a children's playground, kiddie pool and Kids Club daycare center.

An all-inclusive resort, Punta Cana's activities include sailing, windsurfing, waterskiing, kayaking, snorkeling, tennis and aerobic classes. Nightly live performances by entertainers and musicians round out the list of fun things to do. Horseback

(Continued on Page 82)



*Divers descend into the
entrance of a freshwater
cave near Punta Cana.*

Face to

A full-page photograph of a diver in a dry suit and hood, wearing a blue mask and regulator, feeding a large shark. The diver is holding a piece of food in their gloved hand, which the shark is biting. Several yellow-striped snappers are swimming in the background. The scene is set in clear blue water.

UNEXSO'S SHARK FEEDER

Face

with the Sea's Apex Predators

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY WALT STEARNS

Carcharhinidae is the largest family of sharks in the world, containing more than 100 species. This family is also known as the Requiem (the first word of the traditional Latin mass for departed souls) Sharks. Even today, some mariners consider the presence of these sharks ominous.

On the reef, one member of this family, *Carcharhinus perezii*, the Caribbean Reef Shark (averaging six to eight feet in length and weighing more than 200 pounds), certainly warrants respect. Formidable in appearance, sleek and powerful, it is the master of its domain. Watching a large group of more than 20 rush in, tightly circling a lone diver fully clad in chainmail, is a spectacle that can leave your heart in your throat. With energy reminiscent of a large pack of rambunctious dogs eager to greet their master, the sharks waste no time when the fish is drawn from the can. Focused on the feeder, they display no interest in other divers, even brushing against those watching on the sidelines now and again.

Forever etched in my mind is the horror Captain Quint, the shark hunter from *Jaws*, felt when he found himself in the water with a shark. That prospect used to

send a chill down my spine. Today, I can't get enough time in the water with the guys in the gray suits. I'm not alone. In addition to becoming an attraction for the adventurous, diving with sharks has evolved into big business for several operations worldwide. When it comes to putting divers close to the action, no one does it quite like the Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO) in Freeport, Grand Bahama.

Divers are taken to **Shark Junction**, a wide, sand valley between two reef lines that is marked by an old recompression chamber in 50 feet of water. Here, the eager group, escorted by two UNEXSO safety divers clad in chainmail, is lined up on the bottom with their backs to the chamber. With

safety divers standing watch at both ends, the feeder walks up and down the line so everyone gets a clear, exciting view. During the exercise, the feeder will occasionally drop to her/his knees while at the same time palming the nose of one of these animated sharks, inducing a trance. The shark becomes nearly motionless, permitting the feeder to literally lift it from the bottom and suspend it in his/her arms for up to half a minute. Afterward, snapping out of its hypnotic state, the shark rejoins the feed.

While entertainment is a big part of the experience, safety is a major factor. In addition to the safety divers checking guests' air consumption and general well being, both the feeder and the videographer (al-

(Continued on Page 82)

SKIN DIVER MARCH 1998 47



Left: Wearing a protective chainmail suit, feeder Mark Baron offers a morsel to an eager Caribbean Reef Shark. **Inset above:** Participant Jason Hardy and staff shark feeder trainer Cristina Zenato.

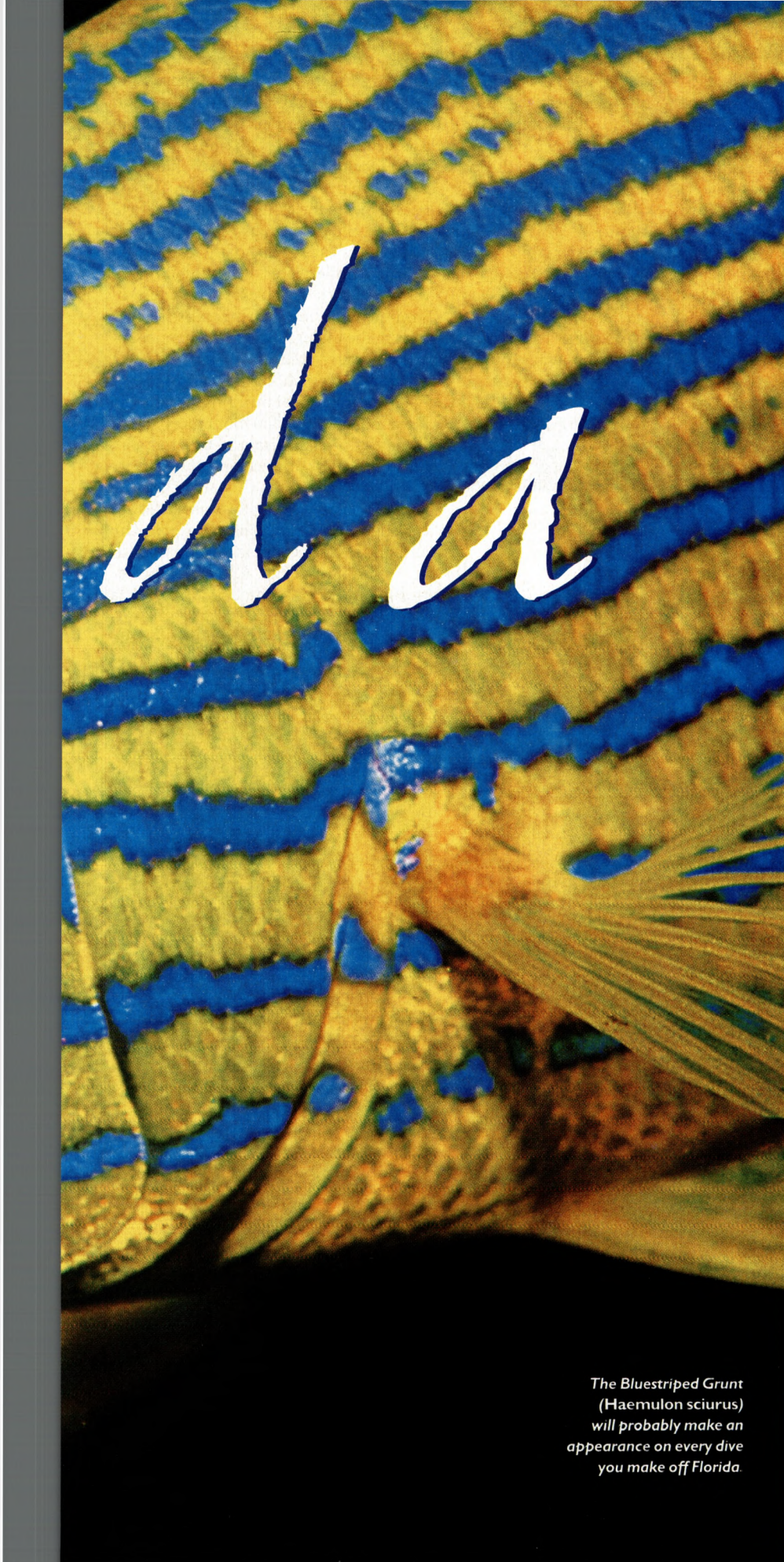
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THE FIVE FACETS OF

Florida





Coast to Coast from the Panhandle to the Keys

BY SHIRLEY BROWN

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN PARKER

Twenty-two years ago I fell off a boat into a wonderland of vivid, moving colors. Fishes flashed like neon signs, corals rose above me like exquisite sculptures and the sun cast starbursts though the blue water.

This was my first trip to the Florida Keys. It was the beginning of a quest to experience every aspect of diving this multifaceted state—a feat I will never accomplish because like the facets of a jewel, Florida changes with time and new highlights are forever appearing.

A map of this state could almost be divided into an emerald-cut jewel. More than 8,000 miles of the state is comprised of tidal coastline and is scattered with thousands of barrier islands. The center is literally waterlogged with springs and rivers. In the northern facet, the Panhandle has soft, rolling green hills covered with pines, huge live oaks, springs and rivers flowing down to beaches of pure white sand and into the Gulf of Mexico's emerald colored waters. Another facet is the west-central Gulf Coast, with its old resort towns. It borders a shallower ocean floor littered with wrecks, ledges and inland springs, which are home to endangered West Indian Manatees. The center facet is honeycombed with limestone passages, caverns, caves, sinkholes and rivers. This freshwater inland diving Mecca is unique in the world. The southeastern facet runs from Palm Beach to Miami and is swept by the warm Gulf Stream. Here, the ocean floor gathers corals and tropical fish to adorn the innumerable wrecks and reefs offshore. The bottom facet, the Florida Keys, offers year-round diving in the waters surrounding the 135 miles of islands from Key Largo to the Dry Tortugas.

As a vacation destination, Florida offers much for families. Travel is easy with interstates and highways crisscrossing the state, connecting major towns and international airports. Vacation planning is easy with accommodations for the "rich and famous" as well as the "poor and lowly." There are restaurants for all tastes and a wealth of attractions to be seen, tasted and experienced.

*The Bluestriped Grunt
(Haemulon sciurus)
will probably make an
appearance on every dive
you make off Florida.*

FIVE FACETS OF FLORIDA

In the south, water temperatures range from the mid 70s (°F) in the winter to 80s in the summer. The weather in the Panhandle is seasonal; therefore, winter water temperatures can be lower. Known as the Sunshine State, Florida has temperate weather in the north and tropical in the southern reaches of Miami and the Keys.

THE EMERALD COAST

Massive schools of baitfish cover the wrecks and dolphin encounters are the

norm along the Panhandle. Stretching from Pensacola in the west to Apalachicola in the east, the white sand beaches along the shore attract nesting turtles during the months of May through October.

There's a raw natural beauty to the inland areas, with springs offering the opportunity to dive salt water in the morning and fresh in the afternoon. Visibility can fluctuate with tides and water conditions, but 40 to 50 feet is average. Water temperatures in the summer are in the 80s (°F); in the winter they are in the 50s to 60s.

Bounties of new and old wrecks attract divers to historic Pensacola. The oldest steel battleship, the 340 foot USS *Massa-*

chusetts, rests in 25 feet of water near the pass. In 75 feet of water lies the Russian freighter *San Pablo*. The 400 foot wreck is collapsed in the mid-section. A section of limestone reef called the **Timberholes** is a favorite with locals because of the Spiny and Shovelnose Lobsters hiding in the holes. Toward the east, Destin lays claim to the finest Blue Marlin fishing, but it's unlikely divers will see one of these beautiful creatures underwater. What they will see on the 100 to 115 limestone reefs of Timberline is huge Arrowcrabs sharing holes in the undercuts with lobsters, snappers and beady-eyed Sand Perch.

Destin and neighbor Ft. Walton are active in artificial reef building. First to go down in 1977 was a 440 foot *Liberty Ship*. The latest, *Miss Louise*, a 95 foot tugboat, was sunk in 1997 just two miles offshore.

Fun loving Panama City attracts more than 40,000 divers a year. Its proximity to the gin clear northern springs of the Panhandle makes it an ideal base for student checkout dive. Close to the St. Andrew Bay pass is the USS *Strength*, a 184 foot WW II minesweeper sitting upright on the sand at 72 feet. In 1989, the



205 foot USS *Chippewa* was sunk in 102 feet of water. It has become home to several big 'cudas. The *Black Bart*, a 185 foot oilfield supply boat, is covered with fish and isn't far from shore. Bridge spans, barges, limestone reefs, airplanes, tanks and a hovercraft are part of the planned-reef program.

A nice drive in the country to the north of Panama City are the springs of Vortex, Cypress and Morrison. **Vortex Spring** has manicured grassy banks leading down to the lozenge shaped spring. Depths range from 20 feet in the basin to 70 feet at the cavern entrance. The cave system extends down to 100 feet and is for certified cave divers only. **Cypress Spring** is in a beautifully wooded area. The circular spring basin is 20 feet deep and there is a small cavern extending to 70 feet. Bald cypress trees surround the spring at **Morrison**. Two caverns are in the spring, one at 20 feet and the other at 80 feet. Each spring offers year-round diving in clear calm wa-

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Experience the
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ter with average temperatures of 68°F.

Seven miles offshore Port St. Joe and Apalachicola, history was made when the 465 foot British tanker, the *Empire Mica*, was sunk by a U-boat in 1942. Sitting on the sand at 110 feet, it's a superb dive with sightings of Loggerhead Turtles, sharks and Amberjack.

Farther south, a series of seamounts rises to 90 feet beneath the surface in an area called the **Middle Grounds**. Fish seem larger than life and corals flourish on the mounts. Dive operators from the Panhandle are happy to arrange special trips to the *Mica* and Middle Grounds.

THE WESTERN GULF COAST

Tampa Bay and St. Petersburg are an hour west of Orlando and Disney World. Vacationing divers are discovering there are wrecks, limestone reefs and ledges that are magnets to a vast variety of marine life.

During the spring, Jewfish, some weighing more than 300 pounds, have been known to visit the wrecks and reefs. Visibility in this area can exceed 100 feet but normally averages at 50 to 60.

The notorious 65 foot *Gunsmoke* was scuttled by drug dealers from Panama City, who, killed two people, threw them in a sinkhole and then tried to outrun the U.S. Coast Guard. The 180 foot tug *Sheridan* was sunk in 80 feet of water as part of the Pinellas County Reef building project. Not far from this wreck lies the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Blackthorn*, again in 80 feet of water. One wreck, called *Doc's Barge*, is a spearfisherman's hangout. Farther south, about 30 miles off the coast of Venice, is the 400 foot freighter *Bay Ronto*. She foundered and sank in 100 feet of gulf seawater during a 1919 hurricane. She lies upside down on the sand with big cracks in her hull.

CENTRAL INLAND SPRINGS

At Crystal River I watched in fascination as a huge creature came toward me trailing a clump of weed in its mouth. The endangered West Indian Manatee spends October through April in the 72°F water of Crystal River and the surrounding springs.

At the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge an encounter with the Manatee must be on its terms. Rules are simple: wait for the Manatee to approach you, no chasing, no separating a calf from its mother, no feeding or entering the Manatees sanctuaries. The local dive operators offer lectures about proper interaction and supply a wealth of information about the docile creatures, as well as the varieties of fish (saltwater and fresh) that visit the springs.

Ings Spring, which is about 75 feet in diameter and 28 feet deep, has recently been cleaned as part of a \$400,000 project to remove years of sediment buildup. There's a good chance a Manatee might

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FIVE FACETS OF FLORIDA

visit with you here. A deeper cavern is at 50 feet and has two entrances. **Twin Sisters** is small and a good spot to see Manatees.

Rainbow River, 20 miles from Crystal River, is a great way to experience a drift snorkel dive in 20 feet of sparkling water. **Devil's Den Sinkhole** at Williston is unique. The spring is 200 feet across, 60 feet deep and often reflects the glorious Florida sky. Access to the water is down wooden steps through a dry cave. Close by is **Blue Grotto**, with an open cavern 25

feet across and a depth of 100 feet.

Central Florida's vast woodlands shelter numerous other springs. Branford is an ideal place to stay as it's close to many of them. **Ginnie Springs** has long been a favorite stopover for divers going to or from the Keys. This 200 acre resort along the Santa Fe River bank accesses seven springs. Two adjoining caverns in Ginnie Spring feature a remarkable white limestone wall. The depth is here is 60 feet and the water clarity is immeasurable. Close to the parking lot is **Little Devil Spring**, where the basin is 50 feet deep. Nearer the river is the 20 foot deep **Devil's Eye**, a popular dive for beginners. **Devil's Ear** is a 40 foot crevasse

leading to the entrance of the cave system. When the river is clear, it's great to float from Devil's Ear to Ginnie Springs. Many of the springs, such as **Peacock Slough**, are within state parks that offer camping and canoeing facilities for all the family.

THE EAST COAST

The warm Gulf Stream bathes the East Coast, bringing with it a tremendous melee of marine life. The current changes daily, allowing rich nutrients to enter the sea from the many inlets. The visibility can be more than 100 feet with water temps ranging in the 70s and 80s (°F). Large pelagics such as Whale Sharks, Spotted Eagle Rays, Mantas and Bottlenose Dolphins are known to cruise the coast.

Drift diving is very popular. The boat captain does all the work and follows the float ball, waiting to pluck you out of the water when you surface.

Elements of surprise are exciting, as you never know what might show up. I've seen sharks, Eagle Rays, schools of Atlantic Spadefish, groupers and, on one occasion, a huge Jewfish covered with remoras.

I made my first drift dive at a local favorite, **Frank's Snapper Reef**, a long ledge with depths extending from 60 to 100 feet off northern Palm Beach. Lots of nooks and crannies hide lobsters, morays and crabs. I'd been told about the resident Bull and Blacktip Sharks but, on this day, they were elsewhere. Another northern local hangout, **Juno Ball Reef**, is a ledge that starts at 30 feet and extends to the sand at 90. Holes in the ledge hide Green Moray Eels, crabs and the ever-present lobster. **Paul's Reef**, in southern Palm Beach, is near exclusive Palm Beach Island. It's a series of colorful broken reefs clouded with bright tropicals hiding in mini-caves with snoozing Nurse Sharks and turtles.

In the same area are the reefs of **Breakers**, **Horseshoe** and **Cable Crossing**, each offering a bounty of bright colors and hidden crevices loaded with invertebrates, octopus and lobsters. Along the eastern coast, from Jupiter to Ft. Lauderdale, dive operators offer drift dives, wreck diving and trips to the shallower reefs for snorkeling and check out dives. Depths range between 25 to 120 feet. The active artificial reef programs in the eastern counties have funded and placed wrecks all along the coast down to Miami.

One of the best drift wreck dives is from the **Mizpah** to the **PC 1170** and then the **Amaryllis**. At 80 to 90 feet, the 185 foot **Mizpah** is covered with growth and attracts an army of schooling Amberjacks, which circle from **Mizpah** to the encrusted portion of the old patrol boat. The huge 450 foot **Amaryllis** freighter is absolutely chock full of schooling grunts and snappers. Sponges and soft corals have transformed the machinery at the northern end

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of the wreck into a garden of color.

Farther south, at Boynton Beach Inlet, is a new wreck, the 175 foot cargo ship, **Becks** (or **Captain Tony**). Not far away is the wreck of the 165 foot **Budweiser Bar**, a German freighter sitting upright on the sand, covered with seaweeds and surrounded by fish. The 65 foot **Swordfish** is near the inlet, covered with a mass of growth and surrounded by critters. Also near the inlet is **Lynn's Reef**, a ledge with depths from 45 to 70 feet. It offers lots of hidey-holes for creatures.

Offshore Boca Raton is **Finks Grouper Hole**, the site of one of the first shark feeding areas in Florida. Captain Charlie Collette has been feeding these Caribbean Reef Sharks for years.

Fort Lauderdale's reefs are reminiscent of The Bahamas and the Florida Keys, with lots of coral and marine life. A well-planned mooring system protects them.

Barracuda Reef is a shallow ledge starting at 15 feet and dropping to the sand at 30 feet. Fans and bright sponges attract a concentration of fish and invertebrates. **Hall of Fame** is popular with photographers with its swim-throughs, arches and undercuts sheltering snappers and juvenile tropicals. At the northern end of **John Lloyd State Park** you can shore dive approximately 200 yards offshore in 20 feet of water. Another family fun shore dive or snorkel, called **HoJo's Reef**, is about 75 yards from the Howard Johnson Hotel.

The 197 foot freighter **Mercedes** literally gatecrashed a party in West Palm Beach and had to be hauled away. She was later cleaned and sunk off Ft. Lauderdale. She lies in two pieces in 100 feet, listing to starboard against a natural ledge.

The **Jim Atria** is a 240 foot freighter that sank in 1987. Hurricane Andrew moved her into 135 feet of water and shifted her upright. Adorned with sponges and deep water gorgonians, she is a favorite with photographers. Not far to the north is the 150 foot freighter **The Rebel**, which lies in 110 feet of water.

Tenneco Towers, a retired oilrig from the Gulf of Mexico, joined the reef building program in 1985. Its series of tiers start at 65 feet and extend to 110 feet. Each tier has different life forms. Sightings of Bull Sharks are common, as are large Amberjacks and baitfish.

The Miami and Key Biscayne area has more than 30 ships, U.S. Army tanks, a watertower and a variety of different structures to dive. Miami has always been the Mecca for tourists; now diving here is becoming popular.

Wrecks such as the 120 foot **Orion** are covered with coral and full of fish. One of the most requested is a Boeing 727 jet called **Spirit of Miami**. A bit of damage was caused by a recent hurricane, but it's still a super dive.

A great place for new divers just off North Miami Beach is a neat idea dubbed the Wreck Trek. A trail connects two wrecks, the 85 foot tug **Patricia** and a 100 foot fishing boat **Miss Karline**, and an odd sculpture of welded radio antennas called the **Radio Antenna**. Other small boats are sunk in the area, making any dive a voyage of discovery.

A recent wreck is the **DeMilly**, a 257 foot freighter. Although she sits in 150 feet of water, a good dive can be made with a 70 foot profile. The two U.S. Army Tanks are an unusual dive at 50 feet. A diver could fill several logbooks with dives around Miami and at the pristine Biscayne National Park.

THE FLORIDA KEYS

The number of dive operators in the Keys must be more than in the rest of Florida, but then they host more than 850,000 divers. The first stop is usually Key Largo, which began an underwater preservation program in 1960. That visionary plan ultimately led to the formation of John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. Soon after followed the Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary and, to protect the entire chain from Key Biscayne to the Dry Tortugas, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1990.

Years ago my first Keys dive was at **Molasses Reef**. I was in awe of the coral for-

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FIVE FACETS OF FLORIDA

mations and the variety of fish. Today, I'm still in awe at this famous dive site of the Keys.

Not far away is **French Reef**, featuring swim-throughs, small caves and overhangs sheltering Glassy Sweepers and groupers. No first trip to the Keys is complete without a dive or snorkel on the statue of **Christ of the Abyss**. I don't believe the original statue in Italy has been photographed or been such an inspiration as its watery nine foot replica.

Another site prized by photographers is **Elbow Reef**. Many ships have foundered here, including three major wrecks that can be explored by divers. A nearby favorite is the **Benwood**, a WW II freighter scattered in 25 to 45 feet of water. This site is one of many where fish, including a large and famous Barracuda, wait for fishy handouts. A night dive on this wreck is a blast!

Outside the park are the twin Coast Guard cutters **Bibb** and **Duane**. They are considered an advanced dive owing to the depth and a probability of strong current. The deeper of the two, the **Duane**, is on its side at 140 feet. The **Bibb** is upright in 110 feet of water; its wide open areas collect a

phenomenal fish population. The mast, complete with a crow's nest, is encrusted with sponges and corals and Barracuda stay motionless at the middle of the mast.

Sometime in the future one of the largest wrecks for an artificial reef, the **Spiegel Grove**, will be sunk in 110 feet of water, near the **Benwood**. She measures a whopping 510 feet with a beam of 80 feet. At present she is undergoing an environmental cleanup. This will be the ultimate fish condominium.

From Islamorada, it's a short boat ride to the **Eagle**. This 287 foot freighter was one of the first to be sunk in the Upper Keys as an artificial reef. She lies on her side on the sand at 110 feet and, since her sinking in 1985, she's accumulated a covering of colorful growth. Jewfish are known to hang out in the darkness of the cargo holds. **Pickles Reef**, at 10 to 25 feet, is similar to a Caribbean reef with Pillar Corals and Purple Seafans sheltering grunts and Flamingo Tongue Shells. **Davis Reef**, at 35 feet, has friendly Green Morays swimming in the open. I also found a beautiful Queen Conch. Close by are ballast stones of two ancient Spanish wrecks. The **El Infante** and **San Pedro** have accumulated a covering of coral over the years and the fish population is amazing.

Marathon, in the heart of the Keys, has not changed much over the years with the exception of the rebuilding of the Seven Mile Bridge.

The sinking of the research vessel **Thunderbolt** in 1986 provided the area with yet another fine wreck site. The 188 foot vessel is intact in 120 feet of water with the top 75 feet beneath the surface. The bridge is great for photography backdrops and fishwatching.

Sombrero Reef offers shallower dives or snorkeling at 10 to 25 feet with lots of milling fish, eels and lobsters.

For years, a few of Marathon's dive operators have been feeding Nurse Sharks on a shallow reef. **Samantha's Reef** is named for a very friendly juvenile. The sharks enjoy the snack of Ballyhoo and seem to enjoy being petted. The reef depths run 20 to 25 feet and appear to be a nursery for these strange creatures, as there are four or five females and juveniles.

At the **Looe Key Marine Sanctuary**, the pristine diversity of the coral, sea grasses and sand flats is protected within the 5.3 miles of sanctuary. Throughout the area, slopes and ledges covered with centuries old coral growth are a wonderful example of the Keys ecosystem. The Key is named for the ship, **HMS Looe**, which sank here in 1744.

To experience the thrills and zany personalities of Key West, join the crowd at Mallory Square for the sunset celebration. The bizarre displays of sword swallowing comics, household cats jumping through



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flaming hoops, contortionists and other acts are worthy of Las Vegas. Nature competes with this show with sunsets of wild colors backlighting the cruising sailboats.

To wet your appetite for diving visit the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum featuring gold treasures from the *Atocha*. It's unlikely you'll be finding gold on the reefs and wrecks of Key West, but you will enjoy the scenery of coral and marine life. The dive operators of Key West are very accommodating and the boats are fast.

One of the most requested dives is the wreck of the 186 foot **Cayman Salvage Master**, originally a U.S. Coast Guard lighthouse tender, then a freighter. She was impounded in Key West by the U.S. Navy while carrying 1,400 Cuban refugees. Her superstructure was removed in preparation to sink her as an artificial reef. However, she sank while under tow to the site, and settled on her side in 92 feet of water. Later a hurricane pushed her upright. The deck is at 70 feet with the cables still visible and the hatches open. The dark interiors are perfect places for the Jewfish that call the wreck home. These mega-fish, one weighing more than 800 pounds, are wary of divers and have a habit turning tail and swimming out of camera range. The other fish and six foot Green Moray Eels are not shy and will appear when a dive-master pulls out the Ballyhoo.

A resident Jewfish on the 75 foot **Joe's Tug** likes to play hide and seek. He hides, you seek. The thumping sound he makes reverberates in the steel hull as he moves toward the coral. This tug is sitting in 65 feet and is surrounded by coral. Sunk in 1984, it's also the home of a very friendly Green Moray and his buddy, a small Nassau Grouper. The eel likes to see his reflection in your dive mask.

Shallower dives are good for the afternoons at **Trinity Cove**, at 45 to 60 feet, is popular. Black Durgon, African Pompano and Crevalle Jack can be seen along with other pelagics. It's close to the blue water of the Gulf Stream so visibility can average 50 to 100 feet. The reef at **Sand Key** is the choice of new divers and snorkelers. Depths range between 10 and 70 feet on the tongue and groove reef. Elkhorn and Staghorn Corals and the remains of a brick lighthouse are highlights of the site.

Key West dive operators can also arrange dive trips to the **Marquesas Keys**. The secluded reefs found there are away from heavy boat traffic, therefore divers have the opportunity of having large coral heads and the small wrecks to themselves.

For a diving vacation, Florida is fantastic! It's easy to get to by road or air, you don't need a passport or visa, and there's no language barrier. It has no weird food, no weight restrictions and, best of all, American dollars, Visa and MasterCard are accepted everywhere. 🐠

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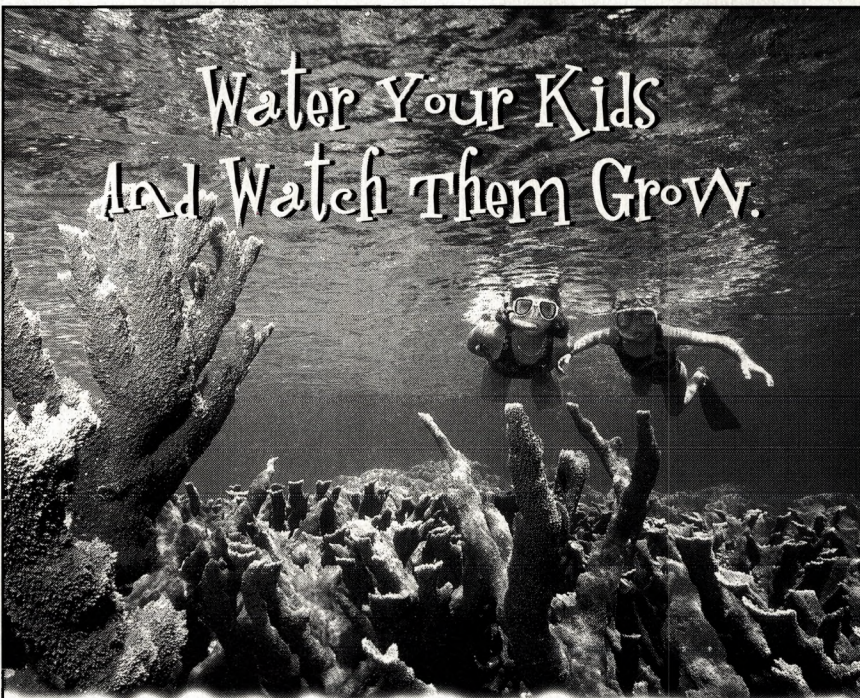
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TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY BILL HARRIGAN

Rob Haff and Jeff Cleary, the owners of Sea Dwellers Dive Center in Key Largo, love diving. These guys still get a kick out of motoring across the clear blue water with the coral reefs shimmering beneath the subtropical sun. They like to try the latest equipment and watch the ever changing parade of dive fashion. Their enthusiasm for the underwater world is only satisfied by regular trips below the surface and they like to share their time with other divers who feel the same way. Sure, they are also business people who need to make a buck to keep the bankers at bay and, obviously, safety is fundamental at Sea Dwellers. But the secret of Sea Dwellers' success is the attitude that fun is the most important part of diving.





An Orange Elephant Ear Sponge provides shelter for a group of wary Porkfish (*Anisotremus virginicus*).

Rob Hoff, center, teaches a resort course in a Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort pool.



Sea Dwellers is a PADI Five Star Dive Facility and has been a favorite with divers in Key Largo for 26 years. The shop is conveniently on the Overseas Highway at Mile Marker 100, across from the Holiday Inn. In addition to a full line of quality rental gear and new dive equipment, Sea Dwellers Dive Center carries an excellent selection of sport clothes and boutique items. Although Sea Dwellers is a full service shop, Rob and Jeff have kept the size of the operation in check, feeling that a small staff and friendly atmosphere are more conducive to fun diving. Personal involvement is another way they ensure that everything runs smoothly at Sea Dwellers, so at least one of them goes out on every trip. PADI master instructor Scott Rodman is in charge of Sea Dwellers' diving instruction, which includes all of the PADI courses through divemaster.

SEA DWELLER III

Sea Dweller III is a big boat Rob and Jeff intentionally limit to 28 divers in order to avoid crowding, even though it is certified for more. With a cruise speed more than 20 knots, this is a fast, comfortable boat that gets you to most dive sites in 20 to 25 minutes. Naturally, *Sea Dweller III* has all the amenities you would expect on a first class dive boat, including freshwater showers, emergency oxygen, camera rinse barrel and a cold cooler for drinks. There are plenty of seating choices, both in and out of the sun. The innovative "action seat" near the dive platform provides a convenient spot to sit safely while you pull on your fins and mask. From there you just stand up and step into the water—easy, safe and fun!

SEA DWELLERS DIVING

Sea Dwellers Dive Center has a wealth of reefs to choose from in the Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary, a prime section of the larger Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary known for its healthy coral coverage and big schools of grunts,

jacks and goatfish. The reefs closest to Sea Dwellers are among the most popular sites in the Keys, including Molasses and French Reefs. The marine sanctuary has installed more than 30 mooring buoys on **Molasses**, owing to the size of the reef and the variety of dive sites there. A dive starting at the deepest part of the reef and heading for the shallowest water would pass from about 80 to about 12 feet, crossing several distinct reef zones. Most divers tour the reef laterally, though, moving across the alternating bands of coral and sand. The tall ridges of fossil coral, topped with living colonies of hard and soft

Sea Dwellers Dive Center

corals, form a maze of parallel minicanyons that are delightful to explore. Every turn offers the possibility of a new discovery and Molasses Reef always seems to dish up something interesting. It's not uncommon to see a Hawksbill or Loggerhead Sea Turtle resting beneath a ledge or find yourself face to face with the gently swaying head of a Green Moray Eel.

French Reef is even more maze-like than Molasses because the coral ridges are not as uniformly parallel. In some places they even double back on themselves, forming elaborate cul-de-sacs, caverns and swim-throughs.

Key Largo Dry Rocks has been home to the **Christ of the Deep** statue since 1963, when the Florida Park Service placed it on

KEEPERS OF THE FUN

a pedestal there in about 15 feet of water. The statue remains an interesting point of focus, but don't neglect to see the rest of this fascinating reef. Technically known as an inner bank reef, Key Largo Dry Rocks has the spur and groove formation typical of outer bank reefs on the seaward side and the generally circular shape of patch reefs on the land side. The depth and layout of coral formations make this one of those rare reefs that really is ideal for both

diving and snorkeling.

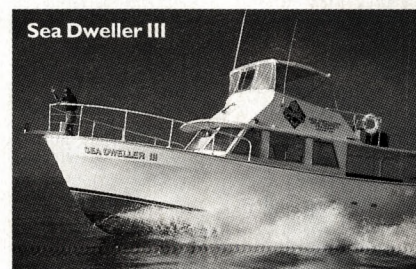
Wrecks are big on the Sea Dwellers dive agenda, starting with the *Duane*. This 327 foot Coast Guard cutter was sunk in 1987 and rests upright in the sand about half a mile south of Molasses Reef with the keel at 115 feet and the top of the mast around 50. Squadrons of Horse-eye Jacks, Permit and Barracuda surround the upper decks, while Queen Angelfish and Stoplight Parrotfish munch on the sponges and corals that liberally coat the hull. Inside the pilothouse and superstructure, schools of grunts huddle for safety, swirling around divers who enter like

smoke from a campfire. The *Bibb*, a near identical sistership of the *Duane*, rests on her side a short distance away. Because of the depth and frequent presence of strong currents, both ships are advanced dives.

The *Benwood* is an easy dive that is a favorite with photographers and fishwatchers. Sunk in 1942 after colliding with another vessel, the *Benwood's* bent and twisted bow can still be seen on the seaward end of the wreckage. Depths on the *Benwood* range from 25 to 45 feet. Of course, when the *Spiegel Grove* finally reaches the bottom, Sea Dwellers will start diving there, too. Long awaited by everyone in the Upper Keys, this 510 foot Navy landing craft carrier will be a spectacular dive.

HOLIDAY INN SUNSPREE RESORT

Lodging packages are available at the Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort. Constant upgrades have made this facility one of the most inviting in the Keys. The heart of the resort is a tropical garden shel-



tered within the privacy of the hotel buildings. Two pools, one for adults and one for children, are set amid lush plantings and a picturesque waterfall. Bogie's Cafe serves breakfast, lunch and dinner inside and lighter fare is available in the outside tiki bar where local bands play live every weekend. Humphrey Bogart's boat from the movie *African Queen* is also on display on the dock outside. Dive packages are available for any number of days desired and include a double room, continental breakfast at Bogie's and a two tank dive trip each day. You also get free passes on the SunCruz Casino boat.

Sea Dweller III ties up at the Holiday Inn dock, so the boat is only steps from your room. To minimize handling your dive gear during your stay, you can turn it over to Sea Dwellers and they will rinse, store and set it up for you each day.

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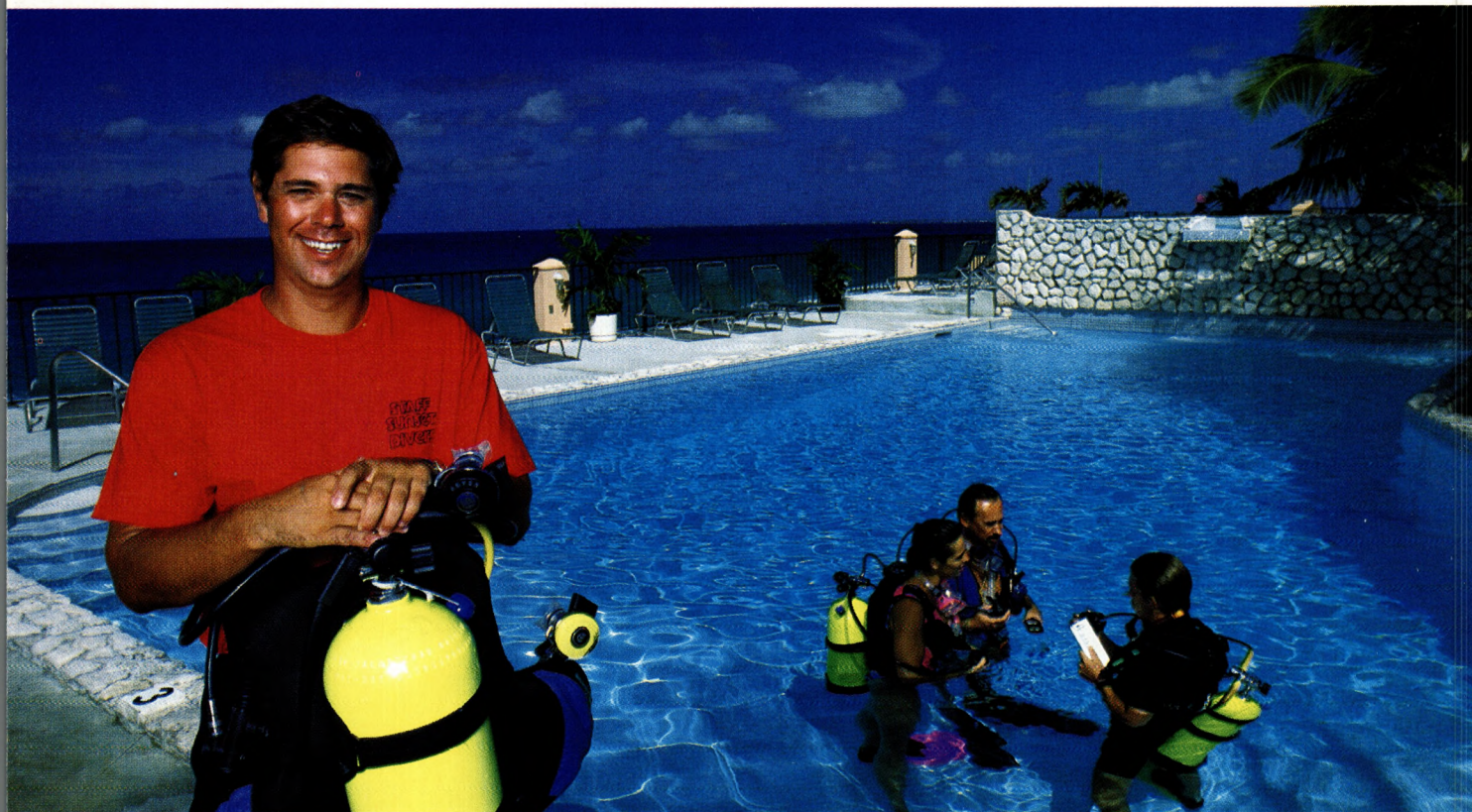
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currently offering a great family package that lets kids stay and dive for free. Here's the deal: one child up to age 16 dives or snorkels free with each paying parent and children up to age 18 stay for free in the same room with parents. The new child care program at the Holiday Inn, including supervised children's activities and a playroom, makes the offer especially attractive. If your child doesn't dive, resort scuba courses and junior open water certifications are available at extra charge for children between the ages of 12 and 15.

For more information or to make reservations, contact Sea Dwellers Dive Center toll free in the U.S. and Canada at (800) 451-3640. From other locations, call (305) 451-3640. E-mail should be addressed to sdwellers@aol.com. The Sea Dwellers Web site can be found at www.sea-dwellers.com/keylargo/.

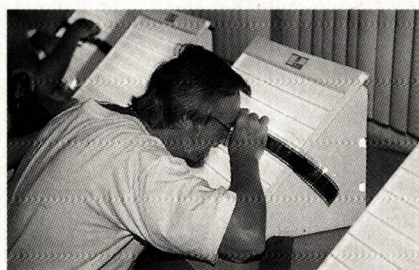
NIKONOS SHOOTOUTS

(Continued from Page 32)

competition in multiple facets of underwater photography, generous prizes and an appealing social element. This is the premier photography event of the year for underwater photographers of all skill levels.

In 1998 two exciting Shootouts are scheduled, both will be held in the fall: There will be one on Bonaire from September 26 to October 3; one on Grand Cayman from November 7 to 14.

The 1998 Shootouts will combine the best of past events, as well as some excit-



ing innovations. Photographic competition will remain the focus, with the traditional categories of macro/close-up photography and wide-angle, plus additional new categories ideally suited to both Nikonos cameras and SLR systems. There will be activities for snorkelers, novices and the opportunity for night photography. Professionals such as Rick Frehsee

and Stephen Frink will be on hand to teach the fine points of underwater photography, and photo repair gurus Bob Warkentin and Fred Dion will be in residence to lend helpful maintenance hints (and make repairs when necessary). U.S. Divers, the leading manufacturer of dive equipment, will have sample gear for loan and to accessorize underwater wardrobes. And, of course, there will be prizes—lots of prizes—underwater camera gear from Nikon, wetsuits from Henderson Aquatics, free film from Kodak and travel prizes courtesy of the host hotels in each destination. There will even be a Peter

Hughes live-aboard dive adventure for two awarded as the Grand Prize.

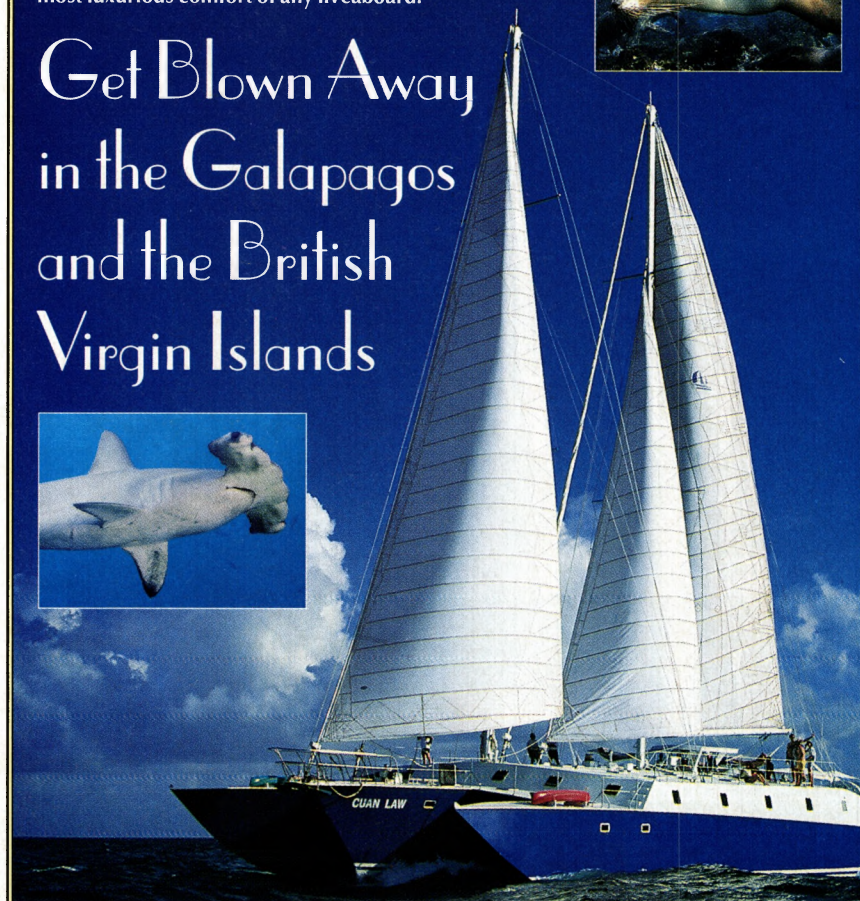
Yet for all the similarities, the 1998 Shootouts will have unique aspects. There will be a single day Fish ID Challenge, where participants are given a list of species and behaviors and asked to shoot as many different fish as possible with a single roll of film. Photographic excellence is less important than fun and education in this competition. Expanded informational lectures will be given by REEF's Laddie Akins to help participants prepare. Night photography will be a part of the macro/close-up shoot and infor-

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NIKONOS SHOOTOUTS

mative lectures about underwater modeling will help prepare those on the other side of the camera for the wide-angle competition. There will be buoyancy control seminars and general photo information will be available from Nikon staff on location.

In order to conduct the quality event the Nikonos Shootouts are designed to be, all participants must preregister and make their travel arrangements through WaterHouse Photo Tours, the official 1998 Nikonos Shootout coordinator. This is a full service tour operator working with all Shootout host properties, including Bonaire's Sand Dollar, Captain Don's Habitat and Harbour Village and Grand Cayman's Sunset House, the Hyatt Regency Grand Cayman, Grape-tree Condominiums and Treasure Island, among others.

WaterHouse has arranged special Shootout Packages with each host property, designed to meet a wide range of budgets and preferences. But remember, all participants must preregister and book through WaterHouse Photo Tours. There will be no on-island registration. Please contact WaterHouse Photo Tours at (800) 272-9122, (305) 451-2228, fax (305) 451-5147. Send e-mail to photo_tours@aol.com or visit the Web site at www.waterhousetours.com.

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SunBreeze Hotel, on Ambergris Caye in Belize, has completed the construction of its freshwater pool, along with extensive refurbishment of the Beachfront restaurant, kitchen and bar.

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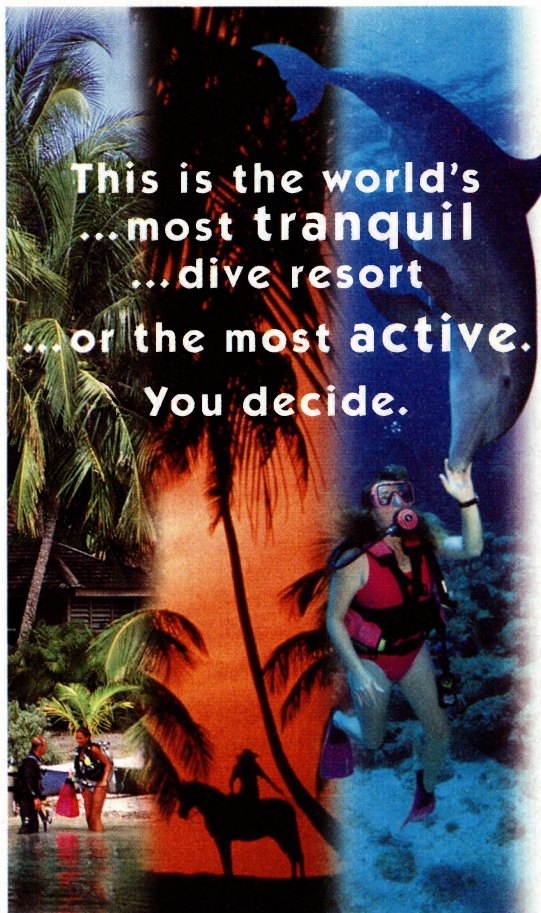


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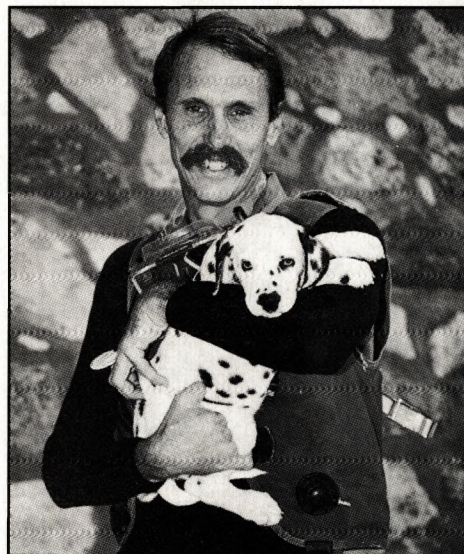
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DIVING THE MALDIVES

(Continued from Page 37)

healthy, pristine state. There were so many species crowded together, obviously in fierce competition but obviously in balance, undisturbed. There were several things I had never seen before: a field of thousands of pink and blue ball anemones, covering several acres; and schools of Bluestripe Snappers in such profusion that the bottom seemed a living mass of shifting color, flashing yellow, blue, yellow.

Looking back, I realize this indelible scene was but a moment in a dive trip that contained so many such moments, each competing for my attention. For ten days, we cruised a several hundred mile, circuitous route that took us through the major atolls of the Maldives—without question, one of the most spectacular marine wonderlands of the planet. Blessed with clear, warm water, a hot, sun-baked climate and a community understanding of the absolute necessity to preserve the marine ecosystem that has created their nation, the Maldives is a "must see" for anyone wishing to experience the ocean's underwater majesty.

In the tropical Indian Ocean, a few hundred miles southwest of India, the Maldives are made up of 1,189 islands that form 26 atolls, sprinkled over 34,740 square miles of blue ocean. To imagine a picture-perfect postcard of the tropics—a white-sand island, crowned with swaying coconut palms and verdant green jungle, surrounded by clear, turquoise waters—is to picture the Maldives.

For divers, there's so much more, because beneath the surface is a collection of marine species found in few other places in the sea. It's difficult to single out what diving the Maldives is like, because there is so much of everything. The water is very clear and warm. There are incredible hard corals and areas where soft corals drape channel walls for miles. There are sharks, Mantas, Eagle Rays and turtles; and there are live shells and tiny invertebrates in profusion. There are wall dives, patch reefs, drift dives and wrecks. Like I said, there isn't really a singular label that does the Maldives justice.

There are also excellent dive services and, among these, the live-aboard *Manthiri* is a star example. One of the most experienced operations in the country, *Manthiri* offers ten day expeditions throughout the vast archipelago, visiting remote sites that never fail to astound and delight. At 85 feet in length, the locally built craft is stable and roomy, providing air-conditioned comfort, excellent food (in large quantities) and the ability to dive to your heart's content. With six cabins—

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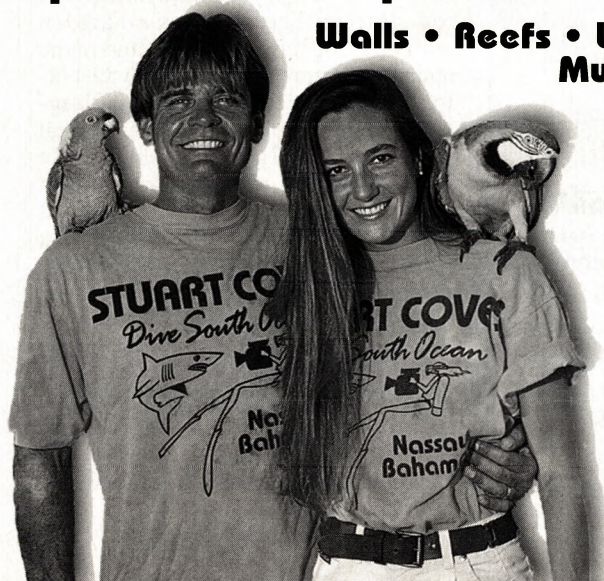
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DIVING THE MALDIVES

four twins and two doubles, each with private bath—*Manthiri* is a smooth, self-contained ocean craft capable of long cruises in maximum comfort.

Manthiri's head divemaster, PADI certified Ahmed Manik, is one of the region's most knowledgeable dive explorers and leads a customer service-oriented crew who cater to guests' comfort and convenience. All in all, experienced live-aboarders will find *Manthiri* holds its place in the rare category of the "world's best live-aboards."

Even with all this, it's the diving that surpasses everything. The various routes visit sites that are astounding in their variety, intensity and excitement. The routes include Male, South Male, Vavir, Felidhoo, Vattaru, Rasdoo, Ari, Baa and Ra Atolls. Regardless of which route is taken, *Manthiri's* offering is world-class and awesome, indeed.

In my photo log journal from my last trip, a few of the entries give an idea of the thrills of Maldives diving:

Fotheyo 1: We reach the site just after sunrise, a spot where a major channel spills over a wall at 35 feet. The top of the wall is covered with fields of waving soft corals, mainly in purples, yellows and whites. Huge schools of snappers and Horse-eye Jacks congregate. Over the edge, the wall is steep, with overhangs full of Black Corals and huge gorgonian fans. At 100 feet, far below us, we spot what we've come for—a school of Scalloped Hammerheads, milling in the deep blue. They move away slowly as we approach, then, suddenly, up from deep water a solitary Leopard Shark moves toward me. She circles then moves close and actually brushes my hip, once, twice and then is gone. I am astounded, pleased and left with wonder.

Maya Shark Point: Inside Ari Lagoon, a long reef rises from a sandy white 100 foot bottom. The top is a coral garden with reef tropicals, Cuttlefish and many anemones. Shortly after we reach the bottom, a large curious Gray Reef Shark appears. Then there's another, then several more. We're at a spot where sharks have been fed for years and they equate us with food. They seem puzzled that we aren't playing the game, but they keep trying, approaching us closely, then sweeping by, a cold stare seeming to accuse.

At reef top, a turtle awakens from slumber to follow us as we move slowly along. At one point, it goes up to the surface, 50 feet above us, for a gulp of air. It then returns, assumes its place next to us and continues with us along our way.

Kuna Manta Point: We ride a strong,

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outbound current down a 50 foot deep white sand and coral bottomed channel. Huge schools of blue spined Unicornfish and Horse-eye Jacks practically fill the water. Suddenly, we spill over the edge of a wall, its steep slope covered with hard and soft corals and thousands of reef tropicals of every description. From deep water, movement and huge shapes—Mantas, soaring up toward the channel mouth, mouths agape as they feed in the brisk current. They pass us, then turn down slope, swinging around to overfly once again, before they disappear into the bright water of the sun-splashed pass.

Gurardhoo Kandu: We drift on the incoming tide toward the channel mouth, along a steep hard-coral slope. Turtles and Napoleon Wrasse, completely at ease and curious at our approach, mingle with the group and follow us to a point at 90 feet, where sharks—Reef White-tips and Gray Reefs—congregate, moving back and forth tirelessly. As we watch, a resident school of Eagle Rays moves over us and slowly circles. As our bottom time comes to an end, we move into the channel to be sucked into a voracious current for a half hour, shallow ride through schooling fish, past coralline structures. Along the channel's edge, we realize the colored movement is a solid blanket of soft corals, in purples, oranges and whites—thousands upon thousands of them—swaying gently in the rippling flow.

The Maldives are reached from Los Angeles, on either Singapore or Malaysian Airlines, connecting through Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, respectively. For complete information on diving the *Manthiri*, contact Tropical Adventures Travel, 111 2nd North, Seattle, WA 98109, (800) 723-4530, (206) 441-3483, fax (206) 441-5431. You can e-mail dive@divetropical.com or visit the Web site at www.divetropical.com.

ESCAPE TO THE BAY ISLANDS

(Continued from Page 39)

area, upstairs restaurant, lounge, disco, offices and two guest wings. The beach front guestrooms radiate from a central hub. Additional guest buildings are beachside, closer to the dive shop/marina and hillside. These two blocks of rooms are most often requested by divers who prefer to be close to the dive center. An additional beachhouse suite brings the total to 78 rooms. Regardless of the location, each guestroom is a masterpiece of tropically inspired interior decoration and each is equipped with shower/bath, phone, cable TV and air-conditioning. For many, the air-conditioned guestrooms (and the fully air-conditioned

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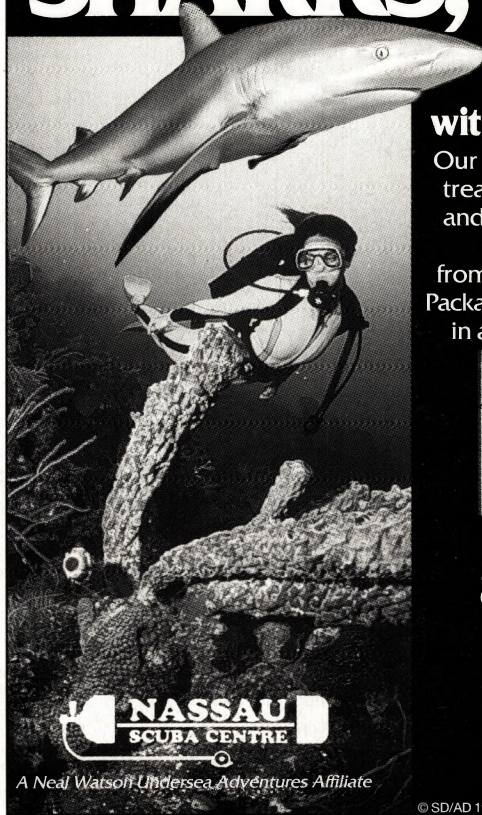


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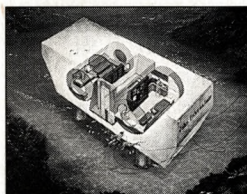
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ESCAPE TO THE BAY ISLANDS

restaurant, lounge and social areas of the main building) should not be minimized as the outdoor environs are not only warm and humid but are sometimes accompanied by sand flies.

Nor can the comfort, appointment, ambiance or cuisine provided by the charming main restaurant be underestimated. Here, meals become the major contributor (next to diving) to a pleasant stay (some meals are also served in the comfortable open air, palapa-style restaurant on the beach). The third ingredient in the exclusive Fantasy Island formula is the dive operation, which is equipped with an entire fleet of custom dive boats and every other mainstay of a complete dive facility. It also has access to both coasts of the island. Roatan is slightly more than 30 miles long and very narrow; Fantasy Island is only about a mile via a private road and resort truck or van from the north coast of the island. Here is a second boat dock, a gateway to north coast diving. With normal weather conditions, during a week's stay, visitors will experience the diving on both sides of the island.

A stroll around Fantasy Island will reveal the extent of variation and opportunity. A most prominent feature is the nearly quarter mile of crescent-shaped beach that borders the oceanside of the islet. Separated from the marina by a beach-breakwater, the beach area is a perfect place for sunning, swimming, snorkeling, canoeing, sailing, etc. On the marina side of the beach is a section of complete watersports, where wave runners, ocean kayaks, wet bikes, sailboats, sailboards, canoes and powerboats are docked or stored. Right in front of an attractive dive shop is a fleet of 42 to 44 foot island-built dive boats. Another vessel of this size and type is kept at the resort's dock on the north coast. Fantasy Island also provides a swimming pool, beach volleyball, lighted tennis courts and a basketball court. Indoors is a well-stocked boutique and snack shop and a conference room large enough for 200 people.

On the eastern end of the property, extending into the lagoon, is a handsome little dive gazebo designed for shore snorkeling and scuba diving. When requested, the dive shop will deliver and pick up scuba tanks at the gazebo. Close by, within easy swimming distance, is a shallow coral garden and the *Prince Albert*, a stunning 120 foot shipwreck.

Southside boat dives are single tank excursions leaving the dock at 9:00 am, 11:00 am and 2:30 pm. Trips to the north are individually scheduled two tank outings. The southern fringing reef is almost



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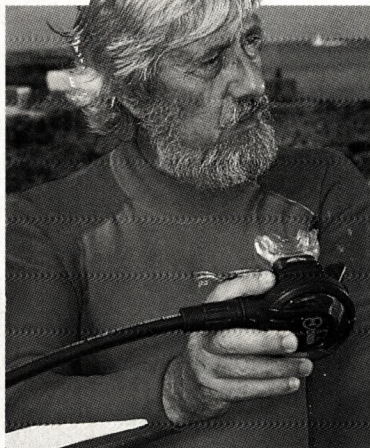
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continuous and lies a short distance from shore. Ninety percent of the sites are wall dives requiring that depth and no decompression limits be closely monitored. The wall settings are generally spectacular, with nearly every color, shape and type of sponge dominating the scenery. On the inside of the wall are shallow reef gardens dotted with stately Pillar Corals. Standout dive sites on the south coast include **Calvin's Crack**, a dramatic crevice and tunnel leading to the outer wall, **Forty Foot Point**, where clusters of reef fish gather, and **Valley of the Kings**, a virtual encyclopedia of sponges.

The north coast is the site of a barrier-type reef with its own distinctive visual appeal. Interesting sites include **Wall Street**, a continuous shallow wall, and **Dolphin's Den**, a coral labyrinth that runs through the reef front.

Visitors to Fantasy Island will want to consider a side trip to the Honduran mainland on their way home. There are wonderful opportunities for complimentary outdoor adventuring, such as visiting Maya ruins or whitewater rafting. Every detail of travel and accommodation can be arranged in the U.S. by contacting Fantasy Island Beach Resort Dive and Marina at (800) 676-2826 or (813) 353-9414. The on-island phone number is 011 (504) 45-5191. 🐠

SAPPHIRE SEAS AND VIBRANT CORAL KINGDOMS (Continued from Page 41)

here were two small subjects. I should have, could have, might have planned for it!

Besides offering beautiful underwater vistas for colorful wide angle photographs, Bonaire also has some rare and unusual reef fish—Longlure Frogfish and Longsnout Seahorses.

It also has excellent dive operations and resorts. The newest establishment on the island, Plaza Resort Bonaire, opened its doors in 1995. Following months of serious refurbishments and landscaping, the sprawling 12 acre complex near the airport was transformed into one of Bonaire's largest five star resorts, with extraordinary luxury accommodations.

The property's owner, the Netherlands based Vandervalk Hotel Company also owns more than 62 resort hotels and restaurants in Europe and Curacao.

Lining both sides of the man-made lagoon (also part marina for visiting yachts) that winds its way through the heart of the property, the accommodations come in a parade of options. Most of the 200 units are Junior Suites, facing either the lagoon or the large, seaside pool overlooking a palm tree studded white sand beach. How

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SAPPHIRE SEAS AND VIBRANT CORAL KINGDOMS

they came up with the term "Junior" for these suites, I will never understand. Each features its own balcony or patio and they are downright huge, with incredibly large bathrooms and closets to match. Air-conditioning, mini-refrigerator, coffeemaker, cable TV with remote, telephone, in-room safe, beautiful rattan furniture and two queen sized beds are standard. The rest of the units are comprised of 48 one and two bedroom villas, 18 one and two

bedroom apartments, four penthouses and four beach houses with fully equipped kitchens and more. Thus, the needs of individuals, couples, families and even large groups traveling together are accommodated with no problem.

Dining choices on the grounds include the open air Banana Tree restaurant near the swimming pool, the Tippy Seagull bar and grill right on the beach—serving everything from hamburgers to salads and pizza—and the more elegant indoor Caribbean Point Restaurant, in the main building next door to the resort's Casino. Between the Casino and lobby area, there

are a couple of gift shops offering souvenirs, jewelry and sundries and the office for Tropical Travel. Tropical Travel can provide anything from nature tours to sailing excursions, snorkel and picnic trips to Klein Bonaire or shopping trips to Curacao and Aruba.

The hotel's concierge can arrange or address services for special events and activities. Some of these include full audio/visual services and access in the large convention room for meetings, wedding receptions and cultural events. For convenience, a small shopping gallery was recently added near the resort's entrance. It features a mini grocery store, hair salon and ATM.

TOUCAN DIVING

Toucan Diving is the watersport operator for Plaza Resort. An associate of the hotel's Caribbean line, Toucan Diving is the Netherlands Antilles' leading IDD (Instructor Dive Development) affiliate. This is the largest scuba education and certification agency in Northern Europe.

Toucan also offers PADI and NAUI certifications. Guests can take advantage of training opportunities from open water all



Plaza Resort Bonaire

the way to divemaster from all three agencies. Certifications beyond that are IDD.

In addition to scuba instruction and being well stocked with the latest equipment from both Tusa and Scubapro in the retail center and rental department, Toucan Diving's dedicated dive boats include two 30 foot Island Hoppers. Both the *Purple Rain* and the *Green Flash* are set up to comfortably handle 12 divers for two tank excursions. Instead of the standard Bonaire one tank am and pm trips Toucan's boats head out from the dock (behind the shop) each morning between 8:30 and 9:00 for a two tank outing, returning around 12:30. During the surface interval, the crew provides snacks and drinks for their guests. Boats depart at 1:30 pm for a single tank trip to Klein Bonaire or, if the group prefers, anywhere along the leeward side of Bonaire. At the center, guests can book their choice of boat dives or simply grab a few tanks and head off on a shore diving adventure. Toucan keeps a large number of tanks available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year for guest use.

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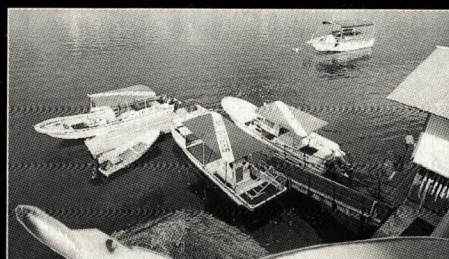
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drink or snack, or just breaking down gear for the day, the large patio area between the shop and dock is great. It is nicely arranged, with large freshwater equipment rinse tanks, shower stalls, restrooms and an equipment drying room featuring private lockers with locks—making it unnecessary to cart wet stuff back to the room. Scheduled to be opened by the time this goes to print is a snackbar next door to Toucan's classroom, facing the patio. Adjacent to both the shop and the resort's main parking lot, A B Car Rental (the office is in the Plaza's main lobby) maintains a fleet of mini-buses and Toyota Rav 4 SUVs.

Along the southern half of the island are some of Bonaire's most striking shore based dive sites. **Salt Pier**, several hundred feet long, drips with color from copious corals and sponges. When there are no ships loading at the pier and at the discretion of the salt company, it is a dramatic sight worth seeing. **The Lake** features large mushroom shaped coral heads, often full of schooling grunts, Goatfish and small snappers, all the way down to a wide sand valley at 100 feet running parallel to shore.

Close-by is Bonaire's premier wreck dive, the **Hilma Hooker**. Sent to the bottom in 1984 (in the same large sand valley that runs to the lake) to create a new dive site, the 235 foot freighter has taken on a moderate amount of growth, the most colorful around her giant propeller and rudder, which are covered in Orange Cup Corals. Although she rests on her starboard side, her massive girth rises 60 feet off the bottom.

18 Palms, just off the resort, features a steep drop-off with a terrace covered with thick formations of Fire Coral and regularly visited by several large Tarpon. For your convenience, Toucan offers free delivery of your dive gear, as well as tanks, to the beach anytime. Just be sure to tell them in advance when you want to go.

In addition to diving packages, Plaza Resort Bonaire also offers special intro-



ductory guided snorkeling and windsurfing packages. For general information and reservations, call Plaza Resort Bonaire's U.S. representative, Travel Marketing Services, at (800) 766-6016, (617) 821-1012 or fax (617) 821-1568. To reach the resort direct, call (011) 599-7-2500 or fax (011) 599-7-7133.

GETTING THERE

Servicing the ABC Islands (Aruba,

Bonaire and Curacao) is the national air carrier, ALM (Antillean Airlines), with regular departures from both Miami and Atlanta International airports. Flight time from Miami to Bonaire averages three hours and there is sometimes a stopover on Curacao. 🐬

DOLPHIN FUN

(Continued from Page 43)

have to be a super snorkeler to have fun with the dolphins—just float along with

the action and you'll have a fine time.

On the ride out to the dolphin grounds, Xenia or Melanie gives everyone a briefing on the encounter, including some fascinating natural history. For instance, did you know Spotted Dolphins are born without spots? A newborn calf looks more like an Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin than a Spotted Dolphin to the untrained eye. As they mature, Spotted Dolphins become more and more spotted. The pods that cruise this area tend to number 12 to 20 individuals. During the Wild Dolphin Excursion, about 10 or 12 of them generally join actively in the fun.

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DOLPHIN FUN

The briefing also includes some sensible precautions such as not trying to touch the dolphins. After experiencing their exuberance and enthusiasm, though, I couldn't help wondering if the dolphins didn't have a similar briefing be-

TRAVEL INFORMATION

U.S. citizens may use either a passport or a certified birth certificate and photo ID for entry into The Bahamas. U.S. and Bahamian dollars are interchangeable and the electrical current is 110 volts. Bimini Undersea can arrange a variety of accommodations on the island, all within easy walking distance. Golf carts are available for rental if you prefer. Dress is very casual. The three Ss—shirt, shorts and shoes—will suffice everywhere, although a jacket may be needed on cool winter evenings.

The best way to get to Bimini is via the Pan Am Air Bridge from either Miami or Ft. Lauderdale. The Air Bridge's safety record is the envy of the airline industry, and flying the airline's twin turbine powered amphibious aircraft is a wonderful change from the normal routine. The 25 minute flight from Miami's downtown Watson Island facility is available three times a day. When you land in the Bimini harbor and taxi out of the water and right into town, you'll know you've come a lot farther than 50 miles.

For reservations or more information, contact Bimini Undersea in the U.S. and Canada at (800) 348-4644. From other locations, call (305) 653-5572. The Bimini Undersea Web site can be found at www.biminiundersea.com.

fore we arrived about playing with the humans. Their briefing would probably include a reminder not to laugh at our awkward antics in the water. It's as if dolphins are F-16s and we are replicas of the Wright Flyer! Their grace, speed and maneuverability are amazing. The incredible feeling of sharing a brief moment of time with these intelligent creatures stays with everyone. Ditch the tanks for once and don't miss this opportunity, it will lift your spirits for months! 🐬

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MICRONESIA RESORT NEEDS VOLUNTEERS FOR CORAL MONITORING PROJECT: Scientifically inclined divers/nondivers are needed for the continuation of the Kosrae Coral Monitoring Project begun in 1996. Volunteer divers and snorkelers will be trained in several coral monitoring techniques and will work under the guidance of a scientist/group leader.

This 6 to 12 week project will consist of analyzing reef transects using one of the 53 mooring buoys (installed in 1997) as a reference point. The work will include fish documentation, measuring visibility and verifying types and health of corals in the monitored areas.

Six divers are needed for each week-long project increment. More divers will allow rotation of working and fun dives. The goal is to have photography and video done by one videographer and one or two still photographers, with four to six additional divers doing the measuring and other documentation.

This research will add to the growing body of knowledge about Kosrae's fringing reef and will allow the tracking of subtle changes.

Groups are forming now, for detailed information contact Katrina Adams at Kosrae Village Resort; phone (691) 370-3483, fax (691) 370-5839 or e-mail KosraeVillage@mail.fm.

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For more information, e-mail Sam's Dive Tours at samstour@palaunet.com and check out the Web site at www.sams-tours.com or call (680) 488-1062, the fax is (680) 488-5003.

Environmental Terminology

BY DENNIS K. GRAVER

Directions: Insert one word per blank.

My buddy and I planned to dive this morning. Before diving, we (1) _____ the diving conditions from a vantage point above the ocean. We noticed the incoming waves approached the beach at an angle but broke nearly parallel to shore. We knew this wave (2) _____ would cause a (3) _____ current along the beach. We also noticed a fan-shaped area of water on the shore, with an adjacent offshore area of turbid water and suspected a (4) _____ at that location. Plunging (5) _____, about four feet in height, indicated the slope of the beach would be (6) _____. The (7) _____, or distance between the waves, was about 100 feet, so we knew we would feel the effects of the waves down to a depth of (8) _____ feet. Several large areas of water had a rust color and suggested the presence of a (9) _____. As we watched, we noticed the pattern of the breaking waves. There were groups of larger waves followed by groups of smaller waves, which were caused by the periodic combining of two wave (10) _____ to form (11) _____. The (12) _____, or return flow of water from the face of the beach, appeared to be swift and strong. We knew the tide would be much higher than normal, so we were not surprised that the visibility appeared to be (13) _____ than normal. Spring tides carry sediment and debris offshore when the tide (14) _____, much of it sinks and the cleaner water that approaches shore when the tide (15) _____ covers the dirty layer at the bottom. We concluded we should go to our alternate dive site.

Conditions at the second site looked better. The water looked cleaner and the waves, less than one foot in height, rolled gently to shore. A strong offshore wind, the small waves and cleaner water made us suspect an (16) _____. The diving would be good, but the water temperature would be (17) _____ than normal. We knew we would not encounter a (18) _____—the abrupt transition between waters of different temperatures. A clean-flowing river dumped fresh water into the sea near our entry site, so we might expect a (19) _____, caused by the abrupt transition between waters of differing salinities. We were fortunate because the timing was just right to allow us to dive during (20) _____ water at high tide.

We planned our dive, suited up, inspected our equipment and entered the water. The visibility was excellent, but there was an abundance of (21) _____ in the first 30 feet of water feeding on the (22) _____ that had been brought into the light of shallow water by the conditions. As we swam offshore, we noticed a slight current that had a northeasterly (23) _____, with a (24) _____ that was less than one fourth of a knot. There was no (25) _____—the back and forth motion underwater caused by passing waves. It was a great dive. We were glad we had dived the alternate site.

ANSWERS: 1. evaluated, 2. refraction, 3. longshore, 4. rip current, 5. breakers, 6. steep, 7. wavelength, 8. 50, 9. red tide, 10. trains, 11. sets, 12. backwash, 13. less, 14. ebb, 15. floods, 16. upwelling, 17. colder, 18. thermocline, 19. halocline, 20. slack, 21. zooplankton, 22. phytoplankton, 23. set, 24. drift, 25. surge.

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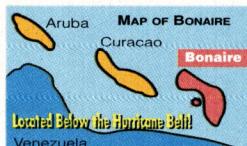
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DIVE NOTES

THE FIJI ISLANDS INTERACTIVE CD-ROM: This presentation is an artistic blend of photos, graphics, sounds, music and video that takes you right into the *bures*, dining rooms and onto the beaches of the most beautiful resorts Fiji has to offer. Each resort is represented by anywhere from 10 to 25 photos, and some with video (Quicktime 1/4 screen) so travelers can make a very informed decision when planning a luxury vacation, dive trip or honeymoon.

Featured are Matagi Island Resort, Qamea Beach Club, Yasawa Island Resort, Turtle Island Resort, Dive Kadavu Matana Resort, the *Princess II*, Marlin Bay Resort, Vatulele Island Resort, Toberua Island Resort, Maravu Plantation Resort, Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort and Castaway Island Resort. Air Pacific and Sunflower Airlines are also featured.

From each resort section, the user can link directly to that resort's internet Web page for the most current information, in many cases right from the islands. A page of useful Web links takes the user to other Fiji Web sites that include date and time gateways, currency exchange, weather information and more.

There are two slide shows featuring some of the most beautiful scenery in Fiji. Photographer Peter Henning has contributed more than 100 beautiful photos for use in the presentation.

Also included on the disk are full color stock photos of Fiji, scanned and color corrected. You can use them royalty free on Web sites, in travel agency brochures or for your own personal photo collection. The images are provided in high resolution jpeg format. A series of full color maps of the Fiji Islands can be printed directly from the presentation.

The "Culture" section describes many Fijian traditions, such as the *lali*, *kava*, a *meke* ceremony, *lovo* feasts and the cannibals in Fiji history. The "Say it in Fijian" page teaches you how to pronounce some important Fijian words.

Compatible with both Macintosh and Windows 95 and 3.1, the CD-ROM was produced by Bonnie Pelnar of Under Watercolours in Irvine, California. The Fiji Islands CD-ROM is available on the internet at www.underwatercolours.com. For more information, call (714) 733-2213.

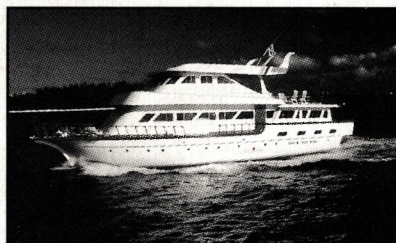
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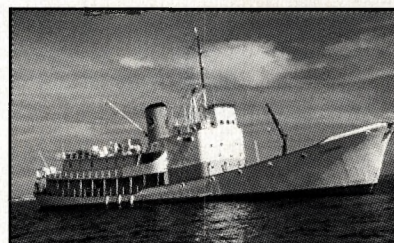
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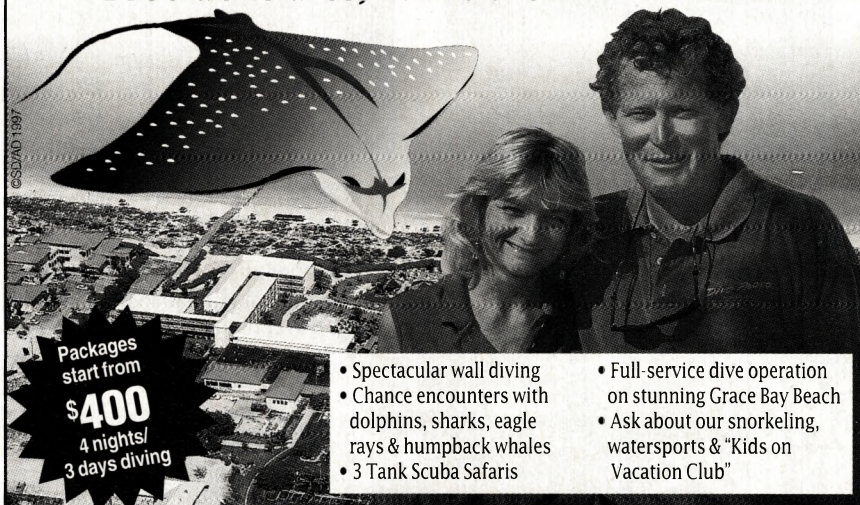
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DIVE NOTES

SEA DANCER RETURNS AFTER SIX WEEKS

IN SHIPYARD: Peter Hughes Diving, Inc., has announced that its popular live-aboard *Sea Dancer* is back in service accessing the spectacular reefs and walls of the Turks and Caicos Islands. It spent six weeks in the shipyard in Florida for routine maintenance and safety inspections, etc. *Sea Dancer* also received cosmetic upgrades throughout the vessel, overhauls to the main engines and generators, air-conditioning system and reverse osmosis water plants, as well as replacement of safety tender and motor.

Of particular interest to divers should be the installation of two new high pressure air compressors, providing a 50 percent increase in the capacity of the high pressure air storage system, along with two new low pressure air compressors to supply the newly installed Nitrox Technologies, Inc. membrane system for the production of nitrox. Nitrox certified divers can now enjoy the added benefits of diving with nitrox; nitrox instruction is also available. Nitrox fills will be complimentary throughout 1998. With complimentary nitrox and prices starting at only \$999, *Sea Dancer* is one of the world's best values for live-aboard diving.

For further information or reservations, call your favorite dive travel specialist or Peter Hughes Diving (800) 9DANCER—(800) 932-6237—(305) 669-9391, (305) 669-9475 (fax). Visit the Web site at <http://www.peterhughes.com> or send e-mail to dancer@peterhughes.com.

THE NEW CAYMAN AGGRESSOR IV: Seacraft Shipyard in Amelia, Louisiana, builders of the *Belize Aggressor III* and *Truk Aggressor II*, is working diligently on the new 110 foot *Cayman Aggressor IV*. This fourth generation *Cayman Aggressor* offers 18 guests the latest in live-aboard accommodations. Luxurious staterooms feature private heads and showers, TV/VCRs, individual climate control and spacious closets. Other amenities will include a hottub, sundeck with wet bar, E-6 processing lab, spacious dive deck, nitrox and rebreathers.

The *Cayman Aggressor IV* will visit the finest dive sites off Grand Cayman and, weather permitting, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac. The shipyard is estimating spring 1998 as the completion date.

For reservations, call your travel professional or Aggressor Fleet, Limited, at (800) 348-2628, e-mail divboat@aol.com or divboat@compuserve.com or visit the Web site at www.aggressor.com.

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7 Mares is the world leader in diving equipment. What is our secret? We could mention staff, technology and materials, but there's something even more important: each product is designed to be the best. Period.

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A Different Side of Micronesia

GUAM TROPICAL DIVE STATION

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY AL HORNSBY

After the seven hour flight from Hawaii, the sight of Guam jutting up from the horizon, its green jungled cliffs rising dramatically from the Pacific's smooth blue, makes it easy to imagine how 16th century Spanish sailors must have felt. After months at sea, the island's tropical splendor meant fresh food, water and a break from the toil of guiding a galleon across a huge expanse of ocean.

Discovered by Magellan in his circumnavigation of the globe, Guam became an important stopping point for ships working the Orient, seeking spices from the Malay peninsula, silk from China and silver from the Philippines. As happened all too frequently in those days, however, when ships entered these scarcely chartered waters, refuges such as Guam could become ominous. With encroaching typhoons, the calm Pacific could become a rolling, angry sea and splendid coral reefs became jagged maelstroms of churning foam and crashing breakers.

Such was the case one dark, dangerous night. The galleon *Nuestra Senora Zergosa del Pilar* was on her way to the Spanish garrison in Manila, Philippines. As salt spray swirled through the air and the ocean roared around them, her crew struggled to move the huge ship past the rugged island that lay in their path. As they were passing Guam's southern tip, just when it seemed they were safe, the *Nuestra* ran upon the low reef extending several miles seaward from the present day town of Merizo.

In the crushing surf, the ship's bottom was ripped out and her treasures spilled into the dark waters. As the massive vessel broke apart and slid beneath the water, the cries of her crew were borne away on the shrieking wind and she disappeared.

In 1989, an Australian diver named John Bent came to Guam, determined to uncover the fate of the lost *Nuestra*. His archival research indicated her resting place must be here, off Guam's southern

A diver is escorted by several Scissortail Sergeants (*Abudefduf sexfasciatus*) while touring Finger Reef. Right: Guam's Umatac Village, nestled at the base of a cliff.

Work Hard,



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end, ironically near one of Guam's most popular watersport areas.

The reef runs several miles out to enclose a large lagoon, with tiny Cocos Island at its outer edge. The lagoon is lush, with stands of corals, white sand and clouds of tropical fish. It is a playground for snorkelers. Outside the reef, the crystal clear waters are home to schooling chub, packs of huge Bumphead Wrasse and cruising pelagics.

There, encrusted with 300 years of coral growth, John found the *Nuestra*. The difficult extraction of her treasures and archaeological wonders continues today.

Along the way, however, a funny thing happened to John and his wife, Paula. They fell in love with Guam. With its rich green jungles, soaring cliffs and long, glare-white beaches, it is a tropical island hide-away. Even more enchanting was what they found beneath the surface of the ocean. Blessed with clean, clear waters—the visibility often reaches 200 feet and more—Guam's wall, wreck and reef diving is varied and exciting, in true Micronesia style.

Deciding to make their stay permanent, the Bents opened Guam Tropical Dive Station, which has become one of the largest, most active dive centers in the Western Pacific. With an extensive line of

gear, full technical diving services, complete repair facilities and local dive charters, the Station has become a headquarters for visiting and local divers alike. For those seeking diver training from entry level through instructor and technical specialties, the operation, a PADI Five



Star Instructor Development Center, has 20 instructors on staff, teaching in English, Japanese, Chinese and Korean.

And, if you have ever entertained the romantic thoughts of diving on a Spanish treasure galleon, the Station's most unique course—a PADI Specialty in Marine Archaeology—could be just what you are looking for. Students actually dive the *Nuestra* with the excavation crew, participating in the retrieval and preparation of

artifacts. Classes are held the first two weeks of April and the last two weeks of July.

For divers on the way to Palau, Yap or Truk, Guam is the required stopover point. According to Paula, "A lot of our customers are on their way to the other destinations. They've found, however, that a couple of days' diving with us gives them a chance to get over their jet lag and do their first great Micronesian diving. Also, since we have full repair services, we can get any equipment problems taken care of before they get off into more remote areas.

"What we really find, though," chuckles Paula, "is Guam's diving is beautiful."

Dive Station's two, fully Coast Guard approved boats—41 and 28 foot flattops—are comfortable and their twin engines can get divers to the reefs quickly, with most sites within 15 to 20 minutes. The dives are varied; here are a few of the crew's favorites:

Western Shoals made everyone's list. It is inside the calm waters of Apra Harbor, just minutes from Dive Station's dock. Staghorn Corals covers the top of the reef, and plate corals make up the sides, descending past 60 feet. The reef is

(Continued on Page 88)

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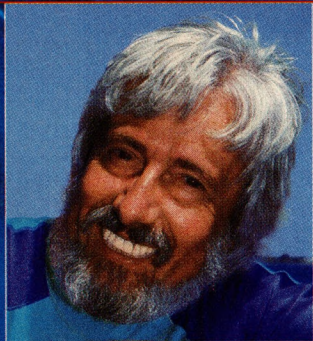
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BAY ISLANDS/BELIZE/PALAU/PAPUA NEW GUINEA/RED SEA/TURKS & CAICO ISLANDS



PHOTO/GERI MURPHY

New Frontiers of Innerspace

BY JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU

PHOTO/RICHARD C. MURPHY/JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU PRODUCTIONS

This past summer, people all over the world thrilled to images sent back from Mars. A remotely operated vehicle drove about on the red planet's surface and transmitted pictures of a world once apparently much like ours, carved and contoured by the erosional whims of water.

Soon the general awe gave way to talk of manned missions to Mars, of transport and commerce and the exploitation of Martian minerals. Finally, there was

talk of settlement. All these rumblings reveal a common unspoken perception: Earth is played out, used up, exhausted. As we humans grapple with problems of pollution, global warming, biodiversity loss and overpopulation, many seem to have lost patience. Earth seems too dirty, too expensive and too small. Now many people are willing to speculate that the time may have come for the human species to look for new digs in space.

The ocean floor is rife with biological marvels, many unseen by the human eye. This new frontier is accessible to anyone with a willing and open mind.

As if to underscore the market for space interest, American television broadcasts four spin-offs of the popular *Star Trek* series, each featuring advanced technologies, skin tight suits and strange alien life forms.

We who explore the inner space of the water planet can only shake our heads in puzzlement. We have similar gear: tight fitting space suits, remotely operated vehicles and shuttles. And, we too are coming up with new discoveries from a vast and distant realm. Yet our world does not enjoy the same renown, especially on television.

This is unfortunate, because we have so much more to offer the human imagination. Unlike *Star Trek* and (so far) the Mars mission, we are actually discovering new creatures in environments once thought too harsh to sustain life: deep-sea cephalopods, crustaceans, sharks and worms clustered around seafloor vents. And, the best part of our adventures is the accessibility. You don't have to undergo months of training in zero gravity conditions at enormous taxpayer expense to discover unexplored parts of the sea, or even to experience the magic of exotic marine life. It's all very close to home.

Creative new forms of dive tourism allow us to extend our recreational explorations. Live-aboards, for instance, besides being tailored to those who literally can't get enough diving, give people an opportunity to go beyond the sites frequented by land-based dive boats. This is good for both divers and heavily-used reefs.

In Fiji, tourism is increasing. Someday, Fiji's popular reefs may feel the pressure of too many divers, as some places in the Caribbean have. So it's important to spread out. Our team is always on the lookout for new sites. Many of these lie some distance from the nearest island and are more suited to live-aboard traffic.

What makes a great new dive site? I'm sure everyone has his or her own opinion, but for me it is a great diversity of life. Knowing where to look for diversity involves understanding geology, currents and marine biology, while being sensitive to the patterns of use in the area. On this last point, divers must remember their playground is usually the supermarket of the local population. Respect for local culture is essential when scouting for dive sites.

We generally begin in a small airplane, flying low over the seas between Fiji's many islands. We look for seamounts, points of land and passages. These geologic structures may lie anywhere from slightly submerged to 100 feet below the surface. Obviously, they are perfect coral habitats and, where there is coral, soft or hard, there can be a dense matrix of other marine life: crustaceans, reef fishes and

larger predators, such as sharks. In these waters, one may even chance upon a Humpback Whale. Passages and currents, especially converging currents, complicate the picture and add to the potential diversity of life. Once a promising seamount has been found, we note its position on a GPS device, then locate it on a nautical chart and return by boat.

A person can only tell so much about a reef from the air. Diving gives the true picture of a reef's character, health and biological diversity. On closer inspection, most of those we visit appear weak, lacking in diversity, or even, sadly, al-

ready despoiled by humans. In our experience, only 10 percent of the reefs we spot from the sky turn out to be fantastic dive sites. Still, that is enough to provide wonderful adventures.

Time and again I am awed by the beauty and mystery of these pristine places. There is a special feeling at every new site. With no signs of people, they appear to be underwater Gardens of Eden. Animals are usually not habituated to the human presence, so encounters are easy, fresh and spontaneous. The colors seem brighter and there seems to be a

(Continued on Page 86)

"SSI Training Saved My Vacation"

—Linda Humpal, certified SSI diver

A TRUE STORY

"I was on my first dive vacation to Grand Cayman and I was really excited about it.

To make any fun dives during the week, I had to complete my referral dives the first two days.

The first day the conditions were a little rougher than normal, and the dive shop wasn't taking any students out.

When the Instructor saw that I was an SSI referral, he said from his experience SSI students could handle the conditions, so he took me out.

He said that I was really well trained and that I did a great job. I got certified and made several wonderful dives that week, including Sting Ray City!

I didn't realize that SSI training made such a difference. Fortunately I picked the best, and my Instructor at home did a great job of preparing me."

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PUNTA CANA BEACH RESORT

(Continued from Page 45)

riding excursions, scuba diving and nighttime use of the tennis courts are available for an additional charge.

PUNTA CANA DIVE CENTER SERVICES

The largest active member of the PADI International Resort Association in the Dominican Republic's eastern region, the beachside facility of Punta Cana Dive Center offers certification courses from

open water to assistant instructor (along with several specialty courses), in addition to Discover Diving resort courses. Dive trips on the 25 foot outboard powered skiff leave twice daily (morning and afternoon) to the reef system along the Dominican Republic's eastern tip.

Working in cooperation with the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation and the Dominican Republic's National Aquarium, Punta Cana Dive Center offers a unique marine education program, which includes a variety of interactive exercises, workshops and games designed to demonstrate not only how this fragile marine

ecosystem works, but what we can do to preserve it. A couple of sites involve fish feeding sessions, along with complimentary reef fish and coral identification courses. Following each dive, fresh fruit and drinks are provided on board.

In addition to visiting the reef systems close by, Punta Cana Dive Center also offers a special two tank, all day excursion to Saona Island and Catalina Island to the far west, which must be requested in advance. Taking approximately one hour by car, followed by a 20 minute boat ride, **Catalina Island** features the second shallowest wall dive in the Caribbean, with a starting depth of 18 feet. From there it drops straight down to 120 feet. For more advanced (beyond open water) divers Punta Cana Dive Center can also arrange a dive in one of the region's freshwater cave systems.

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Dear Natalie

On a recent dive trip, while snorkeling out from the beach to a dive site, I decided to drop down ten feet or so to take a picture of a fish. I was told later that the bottom was only twelve feet deep. After I took one photo, my tank's "o" ring blew out! I calmly ascended. At the surface, I tried to use my power inflator to inflate my BC.

It failed and my regulator stopped breathing at the same time.

Still calm, I ditched my weight belt and started trying to orally inflate my BC. Between the weight of my tank, BC and the swells from the foot or so of surf, I was unable to keep my head high enough to orally inflate my BC. And actually

inhaled water. I started to feel panic and tried to call for help but

I inhaled water, I was almost drowned when my buddy gave me his regulator. I passed out and awoke dazed but safe on shore, rescued by my two buddies. If only I'd had a

"Spare Air" to breathe from! I could have inflated my BC and snorkeled back to shore without help. I'll never dive again anywhere,

not even in 12 feet of water,

without a "Spare Air"

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Testimonial #66



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GETTING THERE

Air travel to the international airport at Punta Cana, on the island's easternmost coast, is as easy as a single hop from Miami (taking as little as two hours) or New York (taking only three and a half hours), via American, TWA, Air France, Lan Chile and Dominair, to name a few. Most provide direct, nonstop flights in and out of the island. A Dominican Republic tourist card (\$10 U.S.) fee to accompany your ticket is paid at the counter during check-in for departure. The only other requirements for U.S. citizens are a valid passport or an original birth certificate accompanied with a valid photo ID.

FACE TO FACE

(Continued from Page 47)

so wearing full chainmail) work together to ensure a safe and exciting production, which, from start to finish, will last 30 to 40 minutes.

When UNEXSO opened its doors in 1966, seeing a shark in the distance during a dive was a big thrill. Back then, most were content to have it stay in the dis-

tance. Subsequent to the release of *Jaws* and the wave of documentary films inspired by both our fears and fascination with these animals, divers suddenly wanted to see sharks—upclose and personal. Doing so, however, was easier said than done. The sharks were there but, without some kind of ongoing program to entice them, their naturally wary, even timid nature kept them away.

That all changed in the late 1980s with UNEXSO's creation of the Dolphin Experience, involving Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphins trained to do a variety of behaviors with people, including an open ocean swim with scuba divers.

Dolphins require a large supply of fresh fish for consumption. And, they won't eat anything less than fresh. Not all marine life, however, is so discriminating. Thinking something productive could be done with dolphin food rejects, UNEXSO's Dive Operations Supervisor, Ollie Ferguson, created an underwater fish feed as a source of entertainment for guests. Daily feeds brought in the reef's resident populace of large groupers, snappers and numerous Yellowtails, but it took little time for a few Caribbean Reef Sharks to take notice. Now, the appearance of these impressive creatures is virtually guaranteed, 15 to 30 generally show up to take the bait offered by the chainmail attired feeder.

Watching UNEXSO perform a feeding session with such an impressive collection of big reef sharks is an adrenaline pumping experience. Before the feed is even half finished, most guests' initial trepidation has evaporated. It is often replaced with an even stronger fascination with these majestic, graceful predators. Even the idea of taking an active role in the adventure, moving about as the feeder does, literally rubbing shoulders with this pack of large sharks, no longer seems far fetched. This desire was the basis for UNEXSO's next phase, the Shark Feeder Program.

This program is designed to provide the ultimate interactive experience. For obvious reasons, not everyone can participate. In addition to the fee, \$2,495 per participant, it is essential divers have excellent water skills (including confidence in their abilities underwater) and a calm nature. Anybody who is newly certified, easily excitable or in poor health, or even seeking a cheap thrill, need not apply. (Note, this is not a course resulting in certification.)

What makes this specialty program unique is the information and insight that is gained about shark behavior, habits and tendencies, as well as their role in the ecosystem. Upon graduation, the participant becomes a member of a rather unique club of fellow shark feeders, receiving a personalized photo album and video chronicling his/her endeavors and an engraved plaque on UNEXSO's Shark

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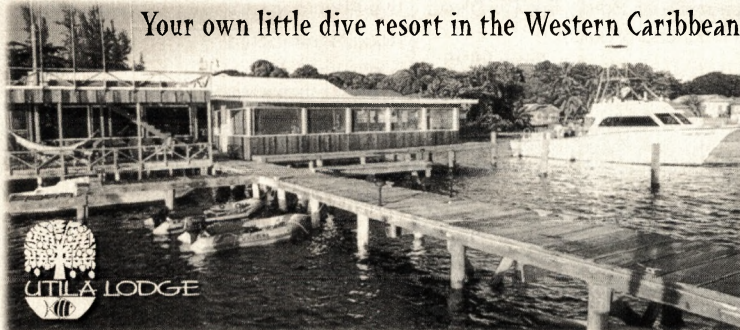
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FACE TO FACE

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Accepting only one to two candidates per month, the program spans four full consecutive days. The participant undergoes complete VIP handling with undivided attention from UNEXSO staff, while getting to go behind the scenes and work with the facilities' key personnel. Following a workbook designed by Ollie Ferguson that outlines the procedures for working with sharks, phase one begins with learning to dive with both the 28 pound Neptunic Stainless Steel Chainmail Suit (resembling the chainmail worn by knights of old) and scuba equipment designed specifically for the activity.

The next step is to understand the pace and timing of a feed, as well as how to control the strike zone. This is done through simulated pool exercises and observing the UNEXSO staff. According to Ollie, women divers seem to master these skills easier than their male counterparts. "It's not a matter of brute strength, but one of finesse," he says. Indeed, since the program started in late 1996, the graduates include more women than men.

Phase three involves playtime with the sharks; no more simulations or watching from the sidelines. The participant applies what is seen and learned during three actual, private feeds. During these sessions, your trainer, personal videographer and two safety divers stay close to provide support, intervening should the sharks become too rowdy or to demonstrate an additional move or technique.

According to Jason Hardy of Bend, Oregon (graduate number nine in the program): "Besides getting past those occasional, nerve wracking moments, getting the pace and rhythm down, the sharks are actually like playing with a bunch of big, happy dogs. They are awesome creatures. Besides being beautiful to watch, they really do have distinguishing personalities." By his second feeding session, Jason was close to mastering the technique of putting a couple of sharks to sleep by massaging the area around the nose. Graduation includes a shark feed before a group of guests to cap the experience of a lifetime.

If once is not enough, all prior graduates are entitled to return to UNEXSO's Adventure Plus/Shark Feeder Program to relive the experience. Instead of going through the entire process again, the shark feeder is taken through a short refresher course wearing the suit and equipment. This special engagement lasts two days and costs about \$1,500.

For more information about UNEXSO's

Shark Feeder Program, call the UNEXSO office in Fort Lauderdale, Florida at (800) 992-3483 or (954) 351-9889 or fax (954) 351-9740. In addition to sharks and dolphins, UNEXSO's services include reef and wreck diving, a complete list of scuba certification courses and a host of snorkel trips and tours. The mailing address is P.O. Box 22878, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33335. 🐟

DIVERS ACADEMY

(Continued from Page 28)

lent physical condition. You must supply a wet or drysuit, mask, snorkel, fins, weight-belt and safety gear (hardhat, boots and gloves). To ease the financial burden, Divers Academy participates in a number of assistance plans. These include Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Loans, Loans to Parents (PLUS), the Pell Grant and Veterans Education Assistance.

Housing for Divers Academy students is arranged at a reasonable cost in private homes in suburban Camden County or in private apartments, depending on each student's needs. The private residences include fully furnished rooms with full house privileges and all utilities except telephone.

The school's administrative staff, teaching staff, classrooms, workshops, changing rooms and equipment lockers are in a two story brick building on the waterfront. The workboat, the *Bulldog II*, a 48 foot long twin screw steel pushboat with a 20 foot beam, is alongside the pier behind the main building. It has three dive stations that can be used as staging centers for underwater projects. A 17 by 22 foot double lock, stationary hyperbaric chamber, a portable double lock hyperbaric chamber, 400 and 500 amp welders and air compressors are dockside. The 36 by 38 foot barge, in a slip adjacent to the main building, adds nine additional training stations. The water depth at all stations ranges between 35 and 45 feet, depending on tidal conditions. Water temperatures vary according to the season. In mid-summer, they can reach the low 70s (°F) while winter temperatures can be a bone chilling 35°F.

Divers Academy helps each student with job placement upon graduation. The classroom sessions teach them the proper way to prepare resumes and the appropriate methods for contacting prospective employers. Prior to graduation, each student meets one on one with Tamara Brown to reap the benefits of her "finger on the pulse of the commercial diving field" expertise. Brown elaborates, "I educate students about opportunities. I sit down with each and every one of my graduates before they leave Divers Academy and go over job placement and salary situations in the industry. Starting

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DIVERS ACADEMY

salaries are important but equally important is how quickly a new diver will move from the lower paying tender position to the higher paying diving positions. This varies in different areas of the country."

Brown continued, "Students can ask me things during these meetings that they might not ask in class. Divers Academy is here to service our clients and our clients are our students. In order to make them profitable, we have to make sure they have the skills needed for employment." This individual treatment is one of the many reasons Divers Academy has a 98 percent placement rate. An important factor for anyone considering a new career is earning potential. In the entry level phase as a commercial diver, you can expect to earn between \$18,000 and \$35,000 a year. Salary increases afterward should average \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year. Top salary ranges could be \$50,000 to \$80,000 or more. Your performance and work attitude will play an important role in advancement and increased income.

Ask the students at the Divers Academy of the Eastern Seaboard for the reasons they chose the school: real life training conditions, a complete program, experienced instructors, the training time frame and the cost. The reputation of Divers Academy is made by its graduates and that is important for a continuing student referral from both graduates and the industry. The school's referral rate is 35 to 40 percent—an impressive figure.

Remember their motto: If you can do it in the Delaware, you can do it anywhere. To enroll or to receive more information, contact the professionals at the Divers Academy of the Eastern Seaboard, Inc., 2500 Broadway, Camden, New Jersey 08104. Call them at (800) 238-DIVE or fax them at (609) 541-4355. Visit the Web page at diveweb/diversacademy or join them at their open house, where you can meet the staff and the students for a first hand experience in the exciting world of commercial diving.

NEW FRONTIERS OF INnersPACE


(Continued from Page 81)

greater abundance of everything.

On Mars or under our own earthly oceans a certain euphoria takes over when something new is discovered, a feeling that here is a treasure for the taking. It is the feeling that has fueled so many gold rushes—and extinctions. Judging from the talk about mining Mars, we haven't learned enough from the trashing of this planet to establish paradise somewhere

else. As for the places we are still discovering here on Earth, we must be careful to remember the same principle applies to them as to those places we already know and love: respect for the life forms that make their home in the sea. We must remember we are guests and guests don't smash china, tear holes in the furniture and tromp through the garden. On a reef, that means we don't kick up sand, grab or knock off coral heads or harass the locals for that perfect photo.

New dive sites present us with an opportunity and a challenge. We should be even more careful at new sites, because intact reef ecosystems are of even greater importance to scientists than they are to pleasure seekers. As we discover new sites, we can learn from past mistakes and take preventive measures for their well being. For example, it is common for live-aboards to "free-boat" at new sites, following the bubbles of divers as they make their way around the site and picking them up when they surface. But, too many people still drop and drag anchors across sensitive corals. For sites destined to be revisited on a regular basis, the answer may be a system called Environmental Moorings, which consists of a stainless steel pin inserted into a hole drilled into the reef's limestone substrate and tied to a float.

If these and other responsible measures are taken, we can use new sites and they will offer a thrilling experience for decades to come. We can also continue to renew our imagination here, on good old planet Earth. It still has a lot to offer if we are willing to look beneath the surface. 

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(Continued from Page 79)

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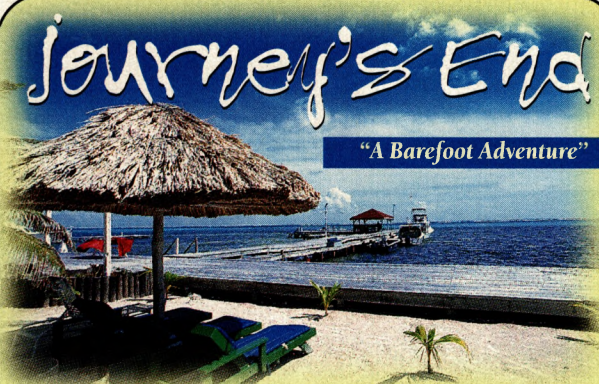


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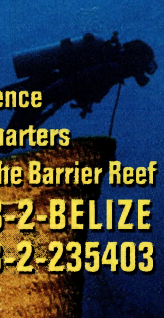


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SUPER

BY MARTY HOFFMAN

To travel and dive with a good friend who is also an inspiration and a great source of help is a joy unequalled. That is how people feel about traveling and diving with Cathy Church. She becomes a good friend right away because she cares about each person—she is ready to help, she is sympathetic to their problems, she is excited about their triumphs and she laughs at their jokes. Add to this an incredible store of underwater photography knowledge and you have a unique travel companion.

Cathy helps a student photograph a cooperative Cuttlefish.

photo/Herb Rafael

SUPER

COURSE

EXOTIC TRIPS

An important ingredient for each trip are the people Cathy and her husband, Herb Rafael, accept for their trips. They try to get to know each participant in advance and look for people who are easy to get along with and who take their good times with them. They enjoy people who are fun to be with, so all nice people, photographers and non-photographers alike, are welcome to join their friendly group.

Cathy is known around the world for the way she helps everyone with everything from emergency repairs to exposure questions. Underwater, she will even put her own camera aside to make sure everyone gets a good opportunity to see and photograph the special creatures. On *Bilikiki* tours she offers a free five day photo course that includes daily lectures, critiques and in-water help.

Herb manages all the travel arrangements, including air, baggage, overnight stays, add-on land tours and the social calendar. Herb and Cathy think nothing of taking the entire group out for dinner and drinks. They do lots of the little things that make a trip special, such as giving T-shirts to the guests and the crew, bringing party favors for birthdays and sending out group photos after the trip. No one makes being a tour leader such a complete profession!

SUPER COURSES

If you are interested in improving your underwater photography, there is no better photo course than Cathy's week-long Super Courses at Sunset House Hotel in Grand Cayman.

There are three elements to these great courses—learning, superb service and

lots of good humor. The courses start on arrival day, cameras are checked out and the basic talk starts with "This is the front of the camera and this..." Topics quickly advance to the basics of composition and the subtleties of a scene to get the best possible photograph.

Throughout the week Cathy uses lecture, critique and lots of individual help above and underwater in a systematic

carried for you to and from the boat. During each three hour dive, you simply go to the stern of the boat where a dry photo instructor will change film, lens or batteries, while two other instructors change your tank and offer you marvelous snacks and soft drinks. Cathy and another instructor are in the water with the group, helping with camera settings, critters, posing or whatever else is needed.

On close-up day, Herb brings a tame angelfish right into your close-up kit framer for a stunning portrait. On the grotto dive, Cathy takes you to the site where her signature print, "Light Beams at Devil's Grotto," was shot. On the wall dive they will help you with lots of subjects Cathy herself has immortalized.

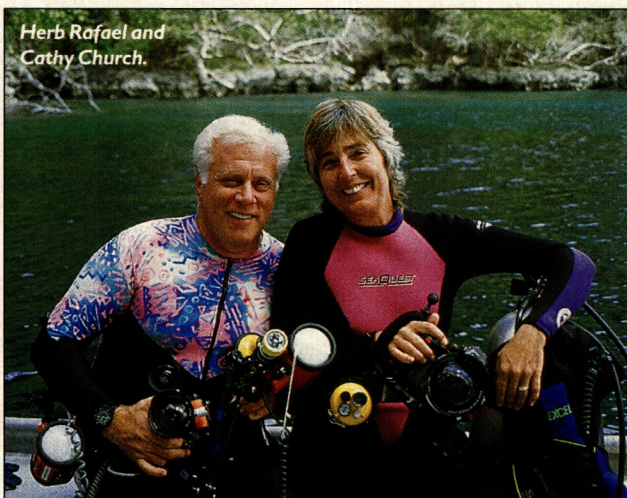
And at just the right moment, in between all the serious stuff, you'll find yourself enjoying a laugh. This is not a school with tests and competition. And, graduation night is like nothing you have seen before. Cathy balances the emphasis on learning and getting great photos with having fun on a wonderful vacation.

FULL SERVICE PHOTO CENTRE

In Grand Cayman, Cathy Church's Underwater Photo Centre and Galleries at Sunset House (and a second mini-location at Coconut Place on Seven Mile Beach) are a Mecca for any visitor interested in taking photographs underwater or in just wandering through her busy gallery.

You can enjoy afternoon half day classes (which qualify you for the PADI or SSI photo specialty) or get a free, easy mini-lesson when you rent a Nikonos, Sea & Sea or video camera system. Cathy's won-

(Continued on Page 101)



Cathy Church: Teacher, Tour Leader and Friend

approach to assure that everyone realizes his/her best potential. In logical fashion she covers ambient light, flash fill, close-up, wide angle, multiple strobes and, of course, buoyancy and balance underwater with a camera. While several of the equipment talks center on the Nikonos system, Cathy also teaches those with the Nikonos RS, Sea & Sea systems and housed cameras.

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Shark Diver White - 711-092 Navy - 711-093

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HATS

Our low crown hats feature 100% cotton canvas construction. Offered in washed navy or beige with Skin Diver Magazine logo or Shark Diver graphic on front. Skin Diver Magazine embroidered on back.

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Navy - 711-101
Shark Diver
Beige - 711-106
Navy - 711-105

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This 100% cotton crewneck shirt has the feel of a polo but the cut of a Tee. Skin Diver Magazine logo and graphics are embroidered on left chest.

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HAWAII'S FRIENDLY TURTLES

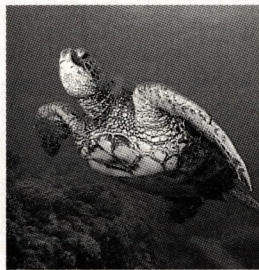
(Continued from Page 18)

that they are somehow innately aware of their protected status in Hawaii. A decade or so ago, when Hawaii started booming as a tourist destination, many of the operators fed the turtles; most have abandoned this practice. Yet years later the turtles continue to interact with snorkelers and divers in the same manner. In fact, they are gentler when there isn't any food in the water. They are always playful and curious.

When these reptiles are not cruising through the open blue, they are usually stretched out on a coral ledge or napping under a protected overhang.

Quite often you can see them visiting the neighborhood cleaning station, being serviced by wrasses, shrimp and tangs. Many fish work as cleaners, removing parasites and diseased flesh from willing customers. For some it's a part time hobby, for others it's a full time job. This is a symbiotic relationship; the cleaners get an easy meal and the turtles get free cleaning.

Although Kauai's turtles do seem the most congenial, you are virtually guaranteed incredible encounters with turtles off



any of the Hawaiian Islands. During the winter on remote beaches, the turtles can be seen nesting. The females come

ashore and lay their eggs in deep pits they excavate in the sand; the sex of each turtle is determined by the temperature of the nest—higher temperatures typically produce females. The tiny hatchlings emerge about eight weeks later and make their mad dash for the relative safety of open water. Turtle eggs and young hatchlings are veritable feasts for hungry sea birds; only a small percentage of the hatchlings ever reach maturity.

GETTING TO KNOW HAWAII



The Hawaiian Islands, volcanic in origin, are exquisitely beautiful above and below. Lush greenery covers only the tips of this expansive subsea mountain range, which extends thousands of feet below the watery surface. At first glance, Hawaii's stark underwater scenery seems barren and lifeless, especially when compared to the grandeur of the South Pacific or the Caribbean. A closer look reveals a tightly woven tapestry of life. Because of the huge expanse of open ocean sur-

rounding Hawaii, the islands do not have the same diversity of species found off other Pacific islands. It is estimated that the Philippines have more than 2,000 species of reef fish; the Marshall Islands about 1,000—in comparison, Hawaii has 450. But anything Hawaii lacks in variety, it surely makes up for in abundance. Hawaii's isolation has also produced an exceptional endemic population of rare species of fish and critters found nowhere else in the world.

There's good snorkeling in Hawaii year-round, however, the water is definitely warmer and calmer during the spring and

summer. Thermal suits made of either Polartec or neoprene are nice in the summer and absolutely necessary in winter when water temperatures plummet to the mid 70s (°F). Although winter brings colder water it also brings Hawaii's other featured attraction—Humpback Whales. Each year between November and June, 500 to 1,200 of these gentle giants migrate to the islands from Alaska to mate and breed. Technically, it's illegal to get in the water with them, but you never know. You could be snorkeling along one day, look up and find a Humpback Whale staring at you. In Hawaii, anything is possible. 🐬

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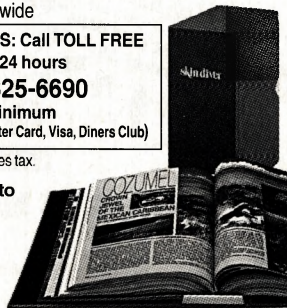
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According to Pudge president David Forman, the cruise line will offer the product to passengers participating in aquatic excursions during the vessel's three and four day trips to The Bahamas, where snorkeling and scuba diving are popular activities. The test program could likely result in the ScubaGuard product being offered on all Royal Caribbean ships.

Amoeba ScubaGuard is used by divers and snorkelers throughout the world. The low cost, high value protection device, which conveniently slips over existing mouthpieces, has been applauded by safety experts in the resort, cruise line and travel industries.

For information on the Amoeba ScubaGuard, contact Pudge president David Forman at (800) 997-8343 or fax (215) 795-9335. Visit the Web site at <http://www.pudge.com>.



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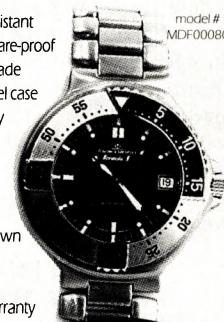
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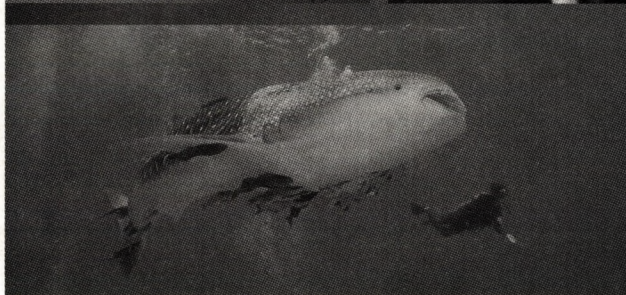
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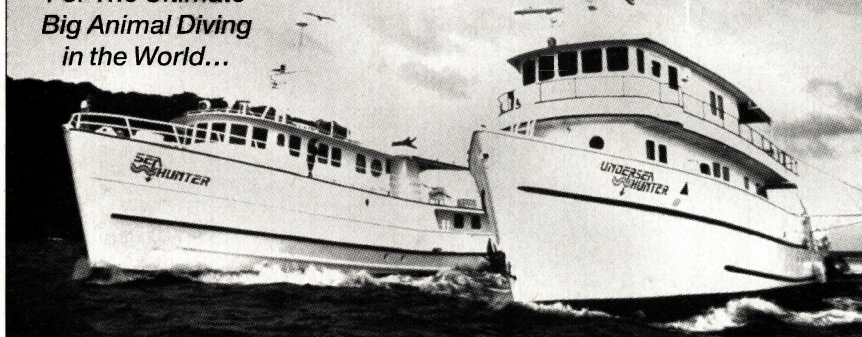
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5

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BIG PINE KEY

THE MOST POPULAR TEK BCs

(Continued from Page 17)

Tek units may be the fastest growing segment of the BC market. A few years ago there were only a few, now almost every major scuba company offers one, and sometimes more than one model. What they have in common is back inflation with extra lift capacity (we show one exception); releaseable weights or the ability to convert to releaseable weights, plen-

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ty of D-rings for accessories and, usually, the capacity to accommodate tanks larger than 80 cubic feet or double tanks, also known as "twins." In Tek terminology, air cells are often aptly called "wings," which they tend to resemble and function

as underwater.

Tek BCs are ruggedly made to withstand tough conditions, often being made of urethane backed 840 or 1,000 denier nylon. Most are adjustable for tank height and user girth (they must accommodate bulky drysuits). Also because they are often worn with drysuits, the torso area is open. Almost all of these BCs have two front closures, on some the topmost one can be moved up or down. The waist closure is often a touch-fastener closing cummerbund with quick-release buckle on top.

Among the models shown on the pre-

vious pages there is a sameness, yet each also has its own special features. And, you can buy your Tek BC in any color, as long as it's black! Space limitations precluded listing all of the details. For those you'll have to visit your local dive store or contact the company (see our list) that sells the BC. 🐟

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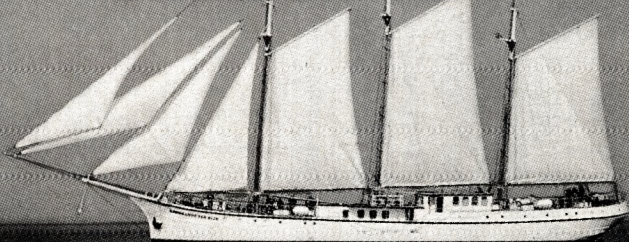
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Glovers Atoll
Friday
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Saturday
Return to Belize City



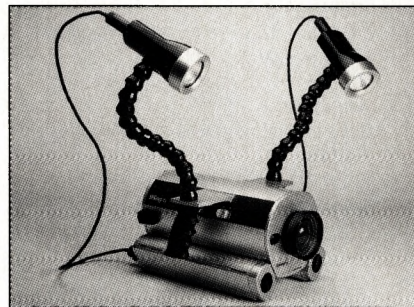
videotips

Choosing a Camcorder Format

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY JIM CHURCH

During the past few years, the two most popular formats for amateur underwater videographers have been standard 8mm and Hi-8. However, there are some new kids on the block. Digital camcorders have arrived with a bang.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? All non-digital camcorders and VCRs use an analog format. The video signal is a stream of fluctuating voltages that magnetically records the picture on videotape. When you shoot



Several manufacturers offer housings and lights for 8mm, Hi-8 and digital camcorders.

or dub (copy) video, the recording VCR can't perfectly duplicate the varied voltages of the video signal. Each copy degrades picture quality.

Digital camcorders send a digital signal—a series of 1s and 0s—from the image sensor to the videotape. Thus, the image is recorded more accurately. If you dub digital to digital, generation loss is virtually nonexistent because the digits (either a 1 or a 0) can be copied exactly.

WHO SHOULD USE STANDARD 8MM? If you want a low budget personal hobby, 8mm is the way to go. Dozens of standard 8mm camcorders are available at prices lower than \$500. You can easily record images that will please your family and friends. However, 8mm has some limitations. First, 8mm images will not be as sharp as Hi-8 or digital images. Second, if you make dubs of 8mm tapes, image quality declines quickly. Standard 8mm camcorders

record less than 300 lines of resolution (a measurement of image sharpness).

WHO SHOULD USE HI-8? Hi-8 is an enhanced version of 8mm video and is still probably the most popular choice for underwater videography. If you want sharper images than 8mm but don't want the added cost of a digital camcorder, Hi-8 is your best choice. Many of the underwater videos you've seen on commercial TV were shot on Hi-8 camcorders such as the Sony TR81 and Sony CCD VX3. Hi-8 camcorders record up to about 400 lines of resolution and cost more than 8mm camcorders.

CHOOSE THE HOUSING FIRST

If you don't have a camcorder, choose the housing before buying a camcorder. Ask manufacturers and distributors to recommend specific camcorders that fit their housings. The finest camcorder can't go underwater if nobody makes a housing for it. Check the following sources:

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San Diego, CA 92109
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(760) 929-1909 (USA)
(760) 929-0098 (fax)

Sony
Web site: <http://www.sel.sony.com/SEL/consumer/camcorder/digital.html>

WHO SHOULD USE DIGITAL? If you want high quality acquisition footage for commercial use, digital is the way to go. Digital camcorders record about 500 lines of resolution, are expensive and can be copied to any other format for editing and duplication. Even if the end product will be a VHS



nu • di • branch (noo'də brāŋk) n.
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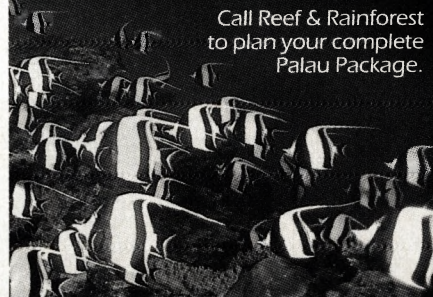
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VIDEO COURSE

copy, the better the image quality on the acquisition tape, the better the image quality of the edited copy. Digital is for professionals, aspiring professionals and rich amateurs.

For computer editing, digital images can be downloaded directly into a computer. The editing can be computerized rather than from tape to tape. Thus, the edit master is of the highest possible quality.

You won't see all the increased picture quality if you connect your digital camera to a TV set with an RCA cord for playback. This is because the RCA cord only passes about 240 lines of resolution to a TV set. If you use an S-video cord and TV input, you'll see about 400 lines of resolution. You would need a digital connection and a TV set that could show 500 lines of resolution.

Don't let the limitations of your present VCR or TV keep you from switching from analog to digital. Your next VCR may be digital and your next TV may have a digital input.

THREE CHIPS OR ONE? Unless the manufacturer states otherwise, camcorders have one CCD chip, which must handle all the colors in the video image. Some camcorders have three chips; one for each of the primary colors.

Any camcorder needs a minimum amount of light to record pleasing images. In bright conditions, a three chip camcorder (either digital or analog) records images and colors more accurately than a one chip camcorder. In dim light, however, one chip camcorders often record better images because the single chip sees all the light passing through the lens. (A three chip camcorder has a prism that divides the light among the three chips. Each chip may see only one-third of the total light. Thus, in dim light, picture quality suffers.) Lastly, I've seen dropouts (those little white glitches) in 8mm and Hi-8 playback but I've never seen a dropout on digital tape.

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SUPER COURSE, SUPER COACH

(Continued from Page 91)

derful staff presents the material just as she would, and sometimes even the jokes are the same. Cathy wants every visitor to have the best time possible. If you miss a dive and can't use your rented camera, there is never a charge. Cathy's attitude is it's bad enough you couldn't dive, you shouldn't lose money on an unused camera rental, too.

Cathy is also available many weeks of the year for private instruction for beginners or for more advanced instruction. This popular format allows you to set your own pace and can include shore dives, boat dives or private charter.

The Photo Centre offers virtually every service a photographer needs. Fast, reliable repairs are available every day for Nikonos V cameras and lenses. They offer thorough testing and maintain a complete stock of Nikonos parts. Make an appointment to have your camera overhauled before arrival or before you go home. Cathy's first rate E-6 lab uses careful monitoring techniques to maintain consistent high quality color slide film processing every day of the week. And there is a complete line of Nikonos, Sea & Sea, Ultralight strobe arms, extension

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LIVE-ABOARD EXCURSIONS: If you want to travel to the South Pacific, join Cathy and Herb for trips to the Solomon Islands on the *Bilikiki*, May 5 to 16 and August 4 to 15, 1998; April 13 to 24, April 27 to May 8 and August 3 to 14, 1999. Trips to Fiji take place on the new *Fiji Aggressor*, May 17 to 27, 1998; Palau on the *Palau Aggressor II*, May 9 to 19, 1999; Chuuk on the *Truk Aggressor II*, May 19 to 29, 1999; and Papua New Guinea on Mike Ball's new *Paradise Sport*, October 1 to 11 and October 15 to 25, 1999. (Call Cathy for the Cathy Church Bulletin, a 12 page brochure describing all of these trips in detail.)

SUPER COURSES: Dates for 1998 are June 13 to 21, June 27 to July 5 (a special repeat student only course with more individual help and fewer lectures), July 11 to 19, August 29 to September 6 and September 12 to 20. (Call Cathy for a brochure describing the 1998 courses.)

tubes, film, batteries, Sekonic light meters and even RS teleconverters for sale.

Cathy is rarely overly serious. When asked about the fake foot protruding from the camera cabinet, Cathy replies that it is just there to keep a smile on your face.

CATHY CHURCH COLLECTION

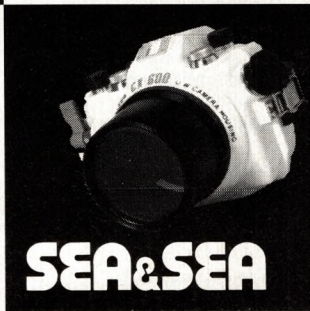
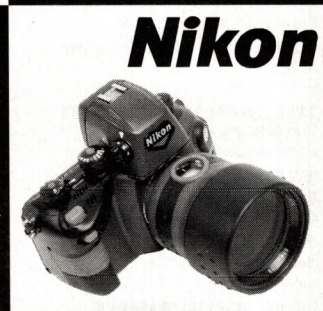
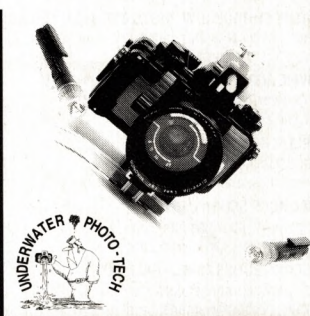
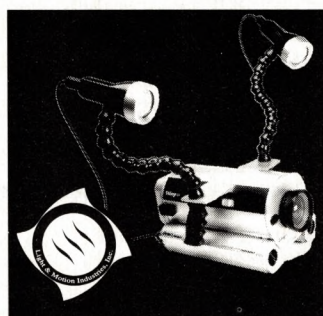
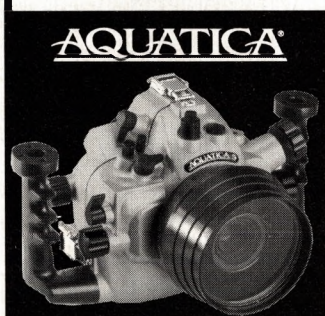
As you take the stairway to either of her galleries, there is no warning just how beautiful the photographs will be. Her huge inventory includes more than 60 images, most available in six sizes, in up to 10 different metal or wood frames and a large selection of mats. And, she can ship your print within the United States at no charge.

The 11 by 14 to 30 by 40 inch prints are handprinted on Fuji super high gloss material by Spectrum Sea Color in Binghamton, New York. Unlike regular prints, they will last virtually forever without fading! These breathtaking photos are available at affordable prices and much of the collection is even available as magnets. Call (800) 934-3661 for a color brochure of the Cathy Church Collection. (This number is for print inquiries and orders only.)

Please stop in during your next visit to Grand Cayman. Cathy, co-author of four books and hundreds of magazine articles and an underwater photo teacher for more than 25 years, still enjoys introducing people to the beauty of the underwater world.

You can contact Cathy at P.O. Box 479, Grand Cayman, BWI; phone (345) 949-7415, fax (345) 949-9770 or e-mail brochure requests to cathy@cathychurch.com. Visit her Web site at www.cathychurch.com.

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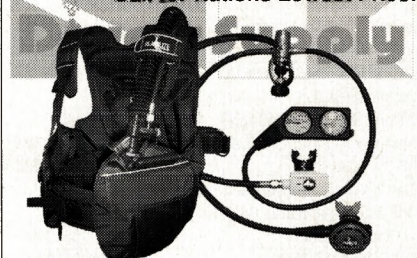
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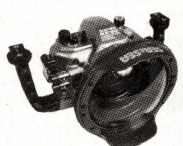
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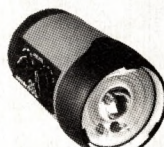
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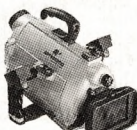
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diving medicine

Atrial Fibrillation

BY FRED BOVE, M.D., PH.D

The most frequently asked questions regarding diving and the heart concern atrial fibrillation. Among abnormal heart rhythms, this one seems to be increasing in frequency. When atrial fibrillation occurs, the upper chambers of the heart (the atria) begin beating rapidly and irregularly, reaching rates of 600 per minute. Fortunately, the main pumping chambers (the ventricles) are protected by a slowing of the signal from the atria so that every fourth or fifth beat reaches the ventricles. The resulting pulse rate is then a fraction of the atrial rate and will be in the range of 120 to 150 beats per minute. When the heart develops this rhythm, the individual will feel an irregular heartbeat and, in most cases, the heart rate is rapid. Some people experience a drop in blood pressure and feel light-headed, fatigued or short of breath. Some patients with coronary disease will develop chest pains. In any case, exercise becomes difficult and the ability to dive is compromised.

Atrial fibrillation is caused by either abnormalities of the heart itself or by excess stimulation of the heart by adrenaline-like medications, too much alcohol or an over-active thyroid. Atrial fibrillation may be related to high blood pressure or to coronary artery disease and there is an increased incidence of it with age. People with abnormalities of the heart or valves may also develop atrial fibrillation. In many cases, there is no identified stimulus and the heart is normal when the atrial fibrillation develops.

The relation of atrial fibrillation to alcohol is well known and has been labeled the "Holiday Heart Syndrome." Atrial fibrillation may be sporadic, occurring unpredictably or with exercise, diving or alcohol ingestion. It may be continuous. Many people have chronic continuous atrial fibrillation and, with proper medication, have no symptoms. When treating atrial fibrillation, we try to return the heart rhythm to normal with drugs or a brief electric shock. In some cases, the atria do not return to a regular rhythm and individuals must live with chronic atrial fibrillation.

Our greatest concern with atrial fibrillation is the risk of a stroke caused by a blood clot forming in the poorly contracting atria. In people more than 60 years old, the risk of a stroke appears to be


about 4.5 percent for each year atrial fibrillation is present. This risk can be reduced to about one percent per year if anticoagulation is used. Some people will gain adequate protection from a stroke using only aspirin. These individuals are usually younger and have no other heart problems.

There are many divers who take Coumadin, the most commonly prescribed anticoagulant, which is used for a variety of disorders, including atrial fibrillation. In the October 1997 Diving Medicine, we discussed the use of anticoagulants and the problems they may cause.

DIVING WITH ATRIAL FIBRILLATION: For those prone to sporadic atrial fibrillation, diving can be one of the stimuli. When divers are submerged, there is a shift of blood into the upper body from the legs. The added blood in the heart stretches the atria and makes them prone to fibrillation. Some divers will experience transient heart rhythm abnormalities owing to these fluid shifts. Individuals known to have easily provoked atrial fibrillation are usually advised to take medication to keep the heart rate slow in the event atrial fibrillation occurs. Your physician should be able to determine whether you need such medication.

One physician determined his patient needed medication only before diving as there seemed to be little evidence of atrial fibrillation at other times. At the other extreme is the diver who has continuous atrial fibrillation. This individual needs medication to control the heart rate and may also need anticoagulation.

The concern with anticoagulation is bleeding. With any injury (cuts, bruises, broken bones), bleeding can be excessive and will need special attention to ensure minimal blood loss. One concern with diving is injury caused by an ear or sinus squeeze. Bleeding into the middle ear or sinus from a squeeze can cause a severe infection. Prevention of squeezes may require judicious use of decongestants, not diving when congested and continuous equalization of ears and sinuses during descents.

Atrial fibrillation does not mean an end to diving. In the absence of severe heart problems, use of medication to control the heart rate and anticoagulation when indicated will not prevent diving but caution is needed to dive safely. 

Search and Recovery, Marine Pollution and Diving in the Future

BY E.R. CROSS

The search for and recovery of a lost object is usually a recreational diver's first commercial venture. These enterprises are usually successful. They involve only a diver and his buddy. Most of the objects are small and light enough for divers to handle. After a successful search phase, recovery of heavier objects can be made by attaching a line to the object and hauling it into the boat or onto the shore.

A reader from Arizona wrote, "My dive buddy and I do minor search and recovery in several lakes in Arizona. Recently, we found some heavy objects (boats). We now need a method for raising them to the surface.... Our dive boat is a good, safe, dive platform but will not support any added weight."

Various types and sizes of commercial lifting gear are available. Mostly they are inflatable liftbags. Different designs and sizes are capable of lifting weights from a

few pounds to a few tons. The liftbags are collapsible and easy to stow and handle. Different capacity bags have valving and venting systems compatible with the weight that will be handled.

Local recreational dive shops may not have liftbags in the size and lifting capacity needed by a dive team. For a wide range of liftbags, write to Dive Commercial International, 4315 11th Avenue, NW, Seattle, WA 98107-0667. DCI says it can supply most styles and sizes of liftbags.

Before commercial liftbags became available, divers made their own inflatable systems. The most common method was to convert 55 gallon (and smaller) steel drums or barrels into lifting devices. In the September 1980 *Skin Diver Magazine*, Technifacts (then called Scuba-Tech) featured a lengthy article on various aspects of commercial scuba diving. Included were sketches of the conversion

of steel drums to lifting devices. In the September 1970 *SDM* there was a one page article on making a rubberized canvas liftbag that may have been the forerunner of today's commercial liftbags.

Divers should be aware that objects being salvaged, such as boats, engines of various kinds and most containers, may contain oil or other liquid pollutants. During lifting, their contents may spill. One pint of spilled oil may cause a slick equal to the size of two football fields. Such a slick can interfere with the developmental stages of several forms of plankton. Compared to global pollution problems this may appear minor, but the salvager will be held responsible.

Marine pollution is an ongoing global problem. The highest percentage of pollution is washed from the land into the streams, lakes and rivers that ultimately empty into the surrounding seas and

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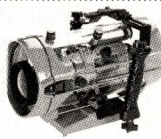
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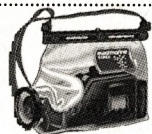
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TECHNIFACTS

oceans. Billions of drops of oil, dripping from millions of cars onto streets, highways and parking lots, eventually flow into the oceans. Research indicates that 180 million gallons of used oil from surreptitious engine oil changes are poured down storm drains. The report concluded, "That is equal to 16 Valdez-type oil spills." The 1983 issue of *The Times Atlas of the Oceans* showed that 28 percent of oil pollution in the oceans is from land run-off; only 24 percent was from tanker operations, including spills. Nearly 75 percent of the ocean near landmasses showed intermittent serious pollution of some kind, including sewage, radioactive material, mine tailings and pulp waste (both sugar and coffee pulps are significant pollutants in some areas). In other areas, fertilizers, many kinds of industrial chemicals and, overwhelmingly, plastic wastes are the problems. Additional killers of marine life are monofilament line and nets.

Divers are unlikely to contribute to marine pollution while engaged in diving. After all, the world beneath the sea is our environment. We like our recreational areas clean and uncluttered. However, there are some kinds of dive or boating paraphernalia that can become either unsightly or potentially hazardous marine debris. Information in the September 1997 issue of *Seawords*, The Newsletter of the Marine Option Program, University of Hawaii, reports that turtles, cetaceans and many kinds of fish are susceptible to

entanglement, either as a result of entanglement or ingestion of some kinds of marine trash. They also become entangled in the plastic retaining rings from beverage can six packs.

The unsightly pollution includes beverage cans, bottles, their cartons and plastic retaining rings. Rarely are smaller forms of marine life trapped or wedged in this form of trash. However, it does occasionally happen. Seldom will dive boats have hazardous nets on board. Nevertheless, proper disposal of even small nets and short lengths of monofilament line should be followed.

In a *Seawords* article, Alice Keesing reported some startling data. Ninety-nine percent of the 312 species of sea birds ingest plastic pellets, mistaking them for fish eggs. Some turtles feed on certain species of jellyfish. Plastic wrappers appear similar to the jellyfish and are also ingested. In a 1996 cleanup of marine trash, more than 20,000 pieces of plastic food bags and wrappers were gathered, as well as nearly 22,000 pieces of plastic foam—a potentially deadly harvest. In addition, 40,209 cigarette butts were recovered. I've heard about second hand smoke; what about second hand tobacco?

THE FUTURE OF DIVING

The science of diving has remained constant for thousands of years. The physical laws of solids, fluids, gases and their interaction remain unaltered. Also, the understanding of diving physiology has remained static for many years. Rewriting proven ideas of the sciences and physiology of diving will not change

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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age-old principles.

In recent months, much has been said about taking diving into the next century. It is important to note that the subject as discussed has been about getting diving *into* the next century and not *through* it. A century is 100 years, a very long time. A lot can happen in 100 years.

For many of us diving started early in the 20th century with Victor Berg, diving for pearls in the South Seas or with Jules Verne's Captain Nemo in the submarine *Nautilus*. In 1934, it was with some disappointment I met the real world of "modern" diving in the Navy: hand pumps and open bottom, shallow water helmets to depths of 60 feet. Usually, a dive was limited to less than one hour. With changes in dive gear and technology, and a much improved understanding of the science of diving, we got to the 21st century. Saturation diving is possible to depths of more than 2,000 feet. Duration of a dive might be 30 days with an additional six to seven days under decompression.

The millions of readers of *Skin Diver Magazine* are predominately into diving as a sport; a healthy, body building sport that is enjoyed by all. Some commercial divers are already into 21st century diving. Their equipment is complex, potentially life threatening and not user-friendly. Some of it is becoming available for very advanced recreational diving. However, this may not be a path recreational divers want to follow. Stay with *Skin Diver Magazine* for your enjoyable path to future diving. You will be glad you did.

DIVE NOTES

PRINCESS II CORRECTION: An incorrectly edited sentence in "Welcome to My Fiji," which appeared in our January issue, indicated the *Princess II* anchors on dive sites. While this live-aboard does take its guests right to the sites, it does not anchor on them. The editors of *SKIN DIVER* apologize to the authors of the article, Jack and Sue Drafahl, and to the owners of the *Princess II*, Nigel and Carol Douglas, for any misunderstandings this may have caused.

For more information on the *Princess II*, call (888) 234-5447.

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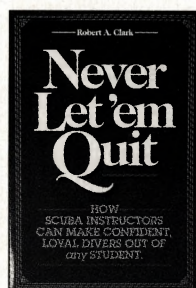
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BY TY SAWYER

Robert A. Clark has been involved in scuba instruction since the early 1960s. His teaching philosophies became the basis for the original Jeppesen *Open Water Sport Diver Manual*, which he authored. These methods evolved into the instructional curriculum for Scuba Schools International (SSI).



Clark's latest book, *Never Let 'em Quit*, encapsulates his three decades of experience teaching divers not only the mechanics of diving well and safely, but instilling in them a lifelong love for the sport, too. *Never Let 'em*

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Never Let 'em Quit, by Robert A. Clark, 9 by 6 inches, 110 pages, softcover, is available for \$15.95. To order, call SSI direct at (800) 821-4319.

DIVE NOTES

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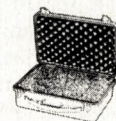
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Slammed and Slashed in an Elkhorn Rinse Cycle

BY ERIC M. OLENICK

The half moon shaped beach in front of our condos in Akumal was protected by an almost continuous barrier reef of Elkhorn Coral, which came within just a few feet of the surface. The reef had a small natural cut that allowed boat passage from the protected waters of the beach to the deeper, open waters of the Caribbean.

My buddy on this dive, Larry, was an instructor I had met at the start of my week long vacation in Akumal. He seemed an excellent and very conscientious instructor; I had watched him help lead several of our previous dives.

Our dive plan was to enter the shallow, calm waters from shore, take a compass heading to a marker pole at the entrance to the barrier reef passage and head into deeper water. I was not wearing a compass and, since Larry was an instructor who had just made the same dive the day before, I felt secure in following his lead.

We began our swim toward the marker pole. The maximum depth was only about 14 feet. There was surge but nothing I couldn't handle (or so I thought). We completed the first leg of our dive. Larry then set off on another heading. I found out later it was the one he had taken the day before. We swam along the new heading to some fascinating coral heads and more Elkhorn Coral swarming with small tropicals. The surge had us zooming over the coral and the ocean floor with incredible speed. This should have sounded an alarm in my head. The surge seemed just as strong, if not stronger, then it had been in the shallower water inside the coral barrier.

Larry and I fought our way around the coral, consuming an incredible amount of air, until our pressure gauges told us it was time to head back. When we surfaced to confirm our plans to return to shore we noticed the skies had grown darker, the wind

had increased considerably, and it looked like another rain storm. Larry took another compass heading, we submerged and began the 800 yard swim back to shore. This is when the fun really started.

I was on Larry's left side, about 15 feet away, flying forward with the surge and then trying to hold position as it moved in the opposite direction. As we came into shallow water, I suddenly found myself on top of the Elkhorn Coral, put there by a

I LEARNED

To confirm the dive plan with my buddy.

Not to put my trust in a brand new dive buddy based solely on his experience and instructor rating.

Not to underestimate the sheer force and strength of the ocean.

large wave. Before I could do anything, another large wave smashed me into the coral. When I finally got my head above the surface, my mouth was full of sea water. The coral had snagged my regulator hose and ripped it from me. I gripped the coral tightly with both hands to keep from being dragged across it by the retreating water. I could not reach for my regulator or switch to my octopus without being swept away. I tried to crawl over the coral and off the reef before the next wave hit, but my right foot had gotten caught and I couldn't move. Another wave pounded me into the coral; my hands and legs were already cut and bloody. *I'm going to die here, I thought. I'm going home in a box.*

About this time Larry surfaced off to my right about 60 yards into the boat channel.

Another wave came and then another. Each one inflicted more damage, drew more blood. But my foot was free. I frantically tried to crawl over the coral, but now my regulator was entangled. I was able to turn around and free the hose just before another wave rolled me across the coral.

Larry finally realized my predicament but was physically unable to reach me. Even a small dive boat stopped to render aid but was also deterred by the reef.

Suddenly, there was a short lull in the waves, long enough for me to gather my thoughts, stick my head below water and spot a small path through the coral. I submerged and swam with all my might. I kicked and clawed my way through the Elkhorn Coral, and cleared the reef just as a wave came crashing down.

Out of breath, heart pounding and still dazed, I filled my BC with air and floated. Larry swam over and we rested before starting our surface swim back to shore.

Later that evening I found out Larry had not set an exact reciprocal heading to the channel opening but had decided to take a short cut.

My first mistake was not confirming the dive plan with Larry. If I had known he was going to take a short cut back to shore, I would have strongly urged against it.

My second mistake was to put my trust in a brand new dive buddy based solely on his experience and instructor rating. I trusted the title instead of my own common sense.

My biggest mistake? I underestimated the sheer force and strength of the ocean. The increased force of the surge should have convinced me to abort the dive and wait for a better day.

When I returned to Houston several days later, I purchased a good compass and learned to use it expertly. It would be my navigation skills I relied on next time. 🐠

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